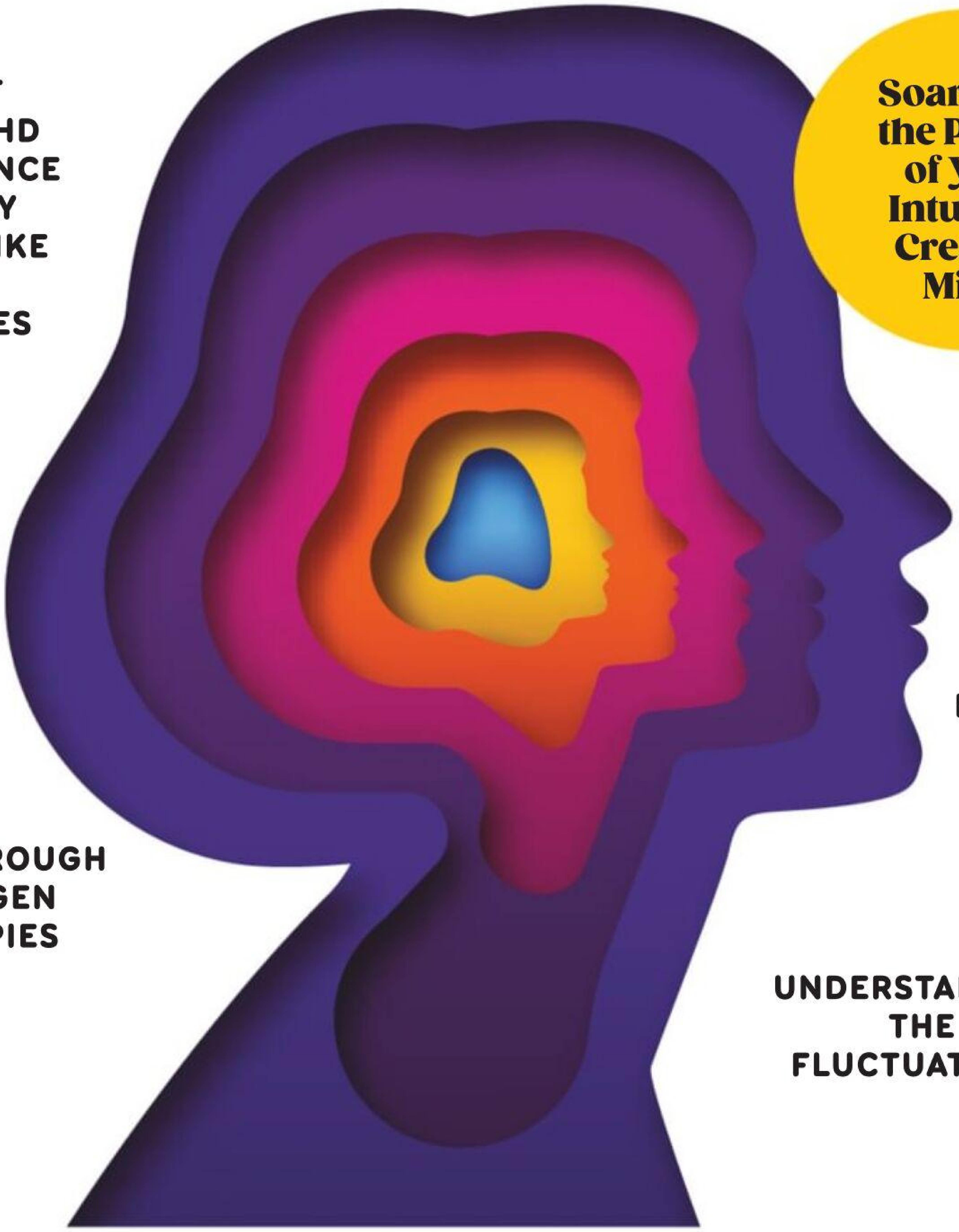
Mastering yoga, quieting the mind, and dozens of ways to boost productivity and focus

ADHD

Special Issue on Girls and Women

Soar With the Power of Your Intuitive, Creative Mind

WHAT THE ADHD EXPERIENCE REALLY FEELS LIKE FOR FEMALES



TEEN SPIRIT

THE FRIENDSHIP PACT

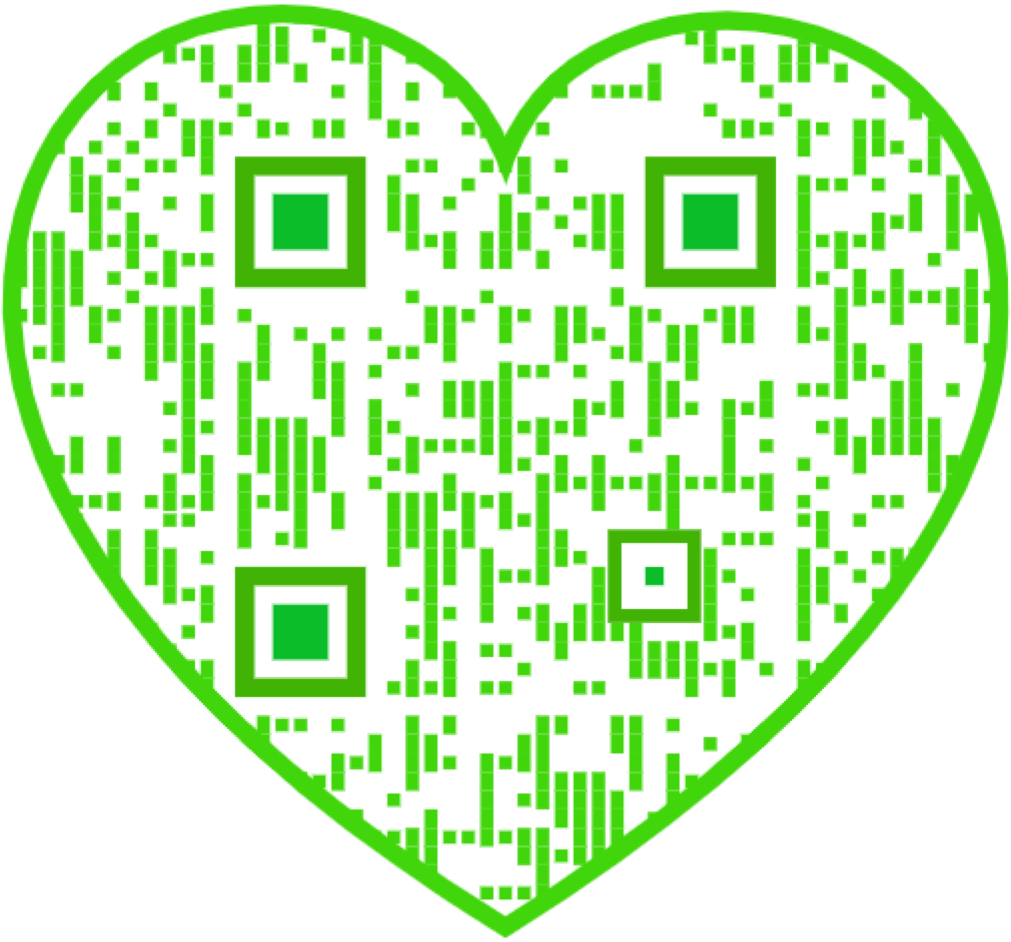
BREAKTHROUGH ESTROGEN THERAPIES

UNDERSTANDING THE FLUCTUATIONS

Centennial Specials/
a360media Specials A

US $14.99 CAN $17.99
Display Until 06/02/25

The ADHD lifestyle: from navigating sleep to choosing the right career, here's how to embrace your authentic best self



ADHD

Special Issue on Girls and Women

Information in *ADHD: Special Issue on Girls and Women* is provided for awareness, education and general information only. Nothing in this magazine can replace advice from your physician, psychologist or other healthcare professional. For diagnosis of any physical or mental condition and for treatment with any medication, supplement or therapy, the reader must consult the appropriate licensed healthcare professionals.

contents

PART 1

ACROSS THE AGES

10
OUT OF THE SHADOWS
ADHD looks different in girls and women, but once they're recognized, they can overcome their challenges and build authentic lives.

18
YOUNGER
The advantages of diagnosing girls by age 8

22
TEEN SPIRIT
Adolescence is a time for growth and retraining the brain.

26
MENOPAUSE MADNESS
Hormones may plummet, but women with ADHD can thrive in midlife.

30
THE CAMP GIRLS
Q&A: Developmental psychologist Stephen Hinshaw on his 25-year study of females in the real world

PART 2

THE BEST TREATMENTS AND THERAPIES

36
BALANCING THE BRAIN
From stimulants to hormones, prescription medications can help. Here's a rundown of the major psychopharmaceuticals for ADHD, along with what you need to know about estrogen replacement therapy and your fluctuating symptoms.

42
COGNITIVE CALISTHENICS
Six effective therapies backed by science

46
CAN YOU GO WITHOUT?
What are the costs and gains for women who decide to back off their ADHD meds?

PART 3

LIFESTYLE STRATEGIES

52
THE QUIET MIND
Mindfulness is one of the most effective lifestyle interventions ADHDer's are likely to find.

56
THE YOGA RX
Movement plus mindfulness can create magical conditions for finding focus and taming impulsivity.

60
NIGHT OWLS
Understanding the connection between ADHD and late-night wakefulness—and what to do about it

64
YOU ONLY NEED ONE
It's harder to make and keep those friends, but women with ADHD are social enough to find their people.

PART 4

CRUSHING IT

70
GAMIFY YOUR LIFE
Work buddies and brainstorming make tasks far more interesting, increasing motivation.

78
GET ORGANIZED
Struggling with your to-do list? Try these methods.

82
GOING WITH THE FLOW
When women with ADHD follow their wandering minds, creativity soars.

88
ADVOCATE FOR YOU AND YOURS
Bend the world your way by asking for what you need.

94
TOOL KIT
Your resource guide on books, podcasts, websites, apps

↘ Informed of her own diagnosis, a woman can bend the universe in her favor by changing her environment and advocating for her wants and needs.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Finding a Voice

FEMALES ARE INCREASINGLY STEPPING FORWARD TO SEEK ADHD DIAGNOSES AND THE SUPPORT THEY NEED. THE RESULT: A SOFTER LANDING FOR MANY, AND A NEW GENERATION OF NEURODIVERGENT CREATORS, INNOVATORS AND ENTREPRENEURS.

Girls and women have long been overlooked when it comes to ADHD diagnoses—and that's an understatement. Decades ago, for every girl diagnosed, 10 boys were identified. Today, the ratio has improved to 2.3 boys for every girl, yet many daughters and mothers in need of help are still being missed. By adulthood, the numbers even out, with males and females being diagnosed in equal measure—revealing so many of the "lost girls" who were overlooked in childhood.

One reason for the gap is that ADHD often presents differently in girls. While they also have issues with focus and self-control like boys, their "hyperactivity" may manifest as a kind of verbal chattiness. Far more than boys, girls and women with ADHD are prone to "rejection sensitivity"—expecting or perceiving criticism, real or not, and reacting with outsized anxiety or depression. A desire to follow the rules and fit in, meanwhile, may cause them to mask their symptoms by working longer and harder, which can lead to years of exhaustion. These subtle, less obvious presentations may cause fewer disruptions for others but wreak havoc on their own lives, manifesting in issues such as chronic underachievement, accidents, eating disorders, and even relationship violence.

Our magazine is part of a groundswell of voices now differentiating ADHD girls and women from boys and men and hoping to set things right. Especially important in this issue is our coverage of fluctuations in estrogen and hormone replacement, a revolutionary approach to female ADHD. Any woman, of course, may feel moodier or more depressed when estrogen levels get too low. But a falloff in estrogen also exacerbates the symptoms of ADHD for those who have it, making things such as organization, decision-making and self-control even more of a challenge than before. Incorporating supplementary estrogen into ADHD treatment for individuals in their teens and beyond is an innovative approach gaining traction among clinicians worldwide, and we discuss it in detail here.

This issue of *ADHD* is packed with strategies to support girls and women because, let's face it, an ADHD-friendly lifestyle can make all the difference in the world. Look here for the latest on mindfulness, exercise and yoga as a means of not just controlling symptoms but also finding authenticity and creative drive. New coaching strategies can help with sleep, motivation, procrastination, and the feeling of "stuckness" that often pervades the ADHD mind—and we cover them here. Gamifying life can boost dopamine levels in your brain, helping you navigate challenges and tap into the strengths that ADHDers excel at—such as divergent thinking, imagination and creativity.

Getting a diagnosis may still be a challenge for girls and women, but once recognized, ADHDers are finding a new world with far less stigma and shame than in the past. In the depathologized ethos of the neurodiversity movement, where the diagnosis suggests high levels of imagination and creative flare, women with unique ADHD minds are finally empowered to ask for what they need—for their children and for themselves.

Wondering how to take action? Our two stories on advocacy techniques and tools will help you get started.

There's a lot to go through, so dig in.

→ ***Pamela Weintraub, Editor***

PART 1

Across the Ages

WHETHER THE DIAGNOSIS COMES AT AGE 7 OR 47, GIRLS AND WOMEN TEND TO HAVE DIFFERENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS THAN BOYS AND MEN. HERE'S WHAT ADHD LOOKS LIKE IN FEMALES, AND HOW TO GET HELP.

Out of the Shadows

ADHD looks different in females. With this new understanding, we can finally start to diagnose the girls and women we've been missing in time to help.

→ By Gilly Kahn, Ph.D.

Meet Dana, a doll-like, verbally advanced 7-year-old girl with bright blue eyes framed by long, dark lashes.

At school, Dana's "the sweet girl" who gets sidetracked talking to friends when she should be focusing on her classwork. But Dana isn't disruptive. She makes up her work and is generally well-liked by her peers. Dana earns good grades. She's polite. She loves her teachers, and the feeling is mutual.

During a parent-teacher conference, Dana's teachers shared that Dana is impressively emotionally aware. Once, the teacher scolded the class for not listening after repeatedly telling the students to quiet down. The teacher looked over to notice Dana's eyes glassing over. After being asked the problem, Dana explained that her "heart is sad."

Dana's teacher knelt to meet her at eye level. "No, Dana—I wasn't talking about you. You weren't interrupting like the other students." She hugged Dana, only to notice Dana's tears were now seeping through her shirt.

Dana navigates daily tasks slowly, which frustrates her parents. Because she doesn't finish her classwork on time, her teachers send that work home. Dana doesn't seem to mind, but her parents don't understand why she can't "just focus" and finish her work at school like the other kids.

Dana takes forever to get ready in the morning, eliciting completely different parenting styles from each parent. This compromises their morning moods and routines (and whether Dana actually gets to school on time). With a ton of aggravation and a bit of luck, Dana usually does enter those school doors before the morning bell rings. That is, with unbrushed hair tucked beneath a thick headband and the facial expression of a child who cried the whole way there.

Personal boundaries are a mystery to Dana. She finds it hard to entertain herself and appears bossy with her younger brother. Being around Dana can feel draining with her excessive talking and need for constant social engagement. The problem is that Dana is still too young to grasp when "enough is enough," so her incessant attempts at ramping up the engagement produces irritability and temper outbursts at home.

Here's some more of what Dana's parents see that her teachers don't: Dana is overly sensitive to clothing. Her grandparents often comment that it looks like Dana's wearing pajamas throughout the day. Dana makes it abundantly clear that she will not wear pants that hit above the belly button or dresses with seams above her waist (good luck finding dresses with that criterion for a 7-year-old), restricting clothing (definitely nothing with a turtleneck and absolutely no denim), or shirts with any sewn-on appliques (because heaven forbid she feels the applique sitting unevenly against her skin). Dana has to feel OK with her sensory intake of the world around her. Otherwise, she might "lose it"—when she gets home, that is.

RECOGNIZING DANA

If I were asked to paint a simple picture comparing males to females with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) based on the published research, it would be misleading. The miscue is that we've been applying criteria developed mostly for young boys to girls and women. In that context, studies looking at sex differences in ADHD explain that females with ADHD are more likely to present with inattentive symptoms (technically labeled "predominantly inattentive presentation") whereas males are more likely to display the "combined presentation," including both inattentive and hyperactive/impulsive symptoms.

But these definitions were developed on samples of mostly male children, so how can we use them to truly capture female ADHD? We can't. By doing so, we are missing what uniquely constitutes ADHD in females, and oversimplifying the clinical picture of ADHD in girls by shoehorning them into the "predominantly inattentive" side of the room.

It's an overly broad approach that overlooks the majority of girls who should be diagnosed. In future research, it would be more effective to compare ADHD girls to non-ADHD girls, rather than contrasting ADHD girls with ADHD boys, says pioneering clinical psychologist Ellen Littman, Ph.D., who calls the practice of only comparing girls to boys with ADHD "comparing apples and oranges." ADHD turns out to be a different animal in females, and should be studied in its own regard.

Cynthia Hammer, M.S.W., ADHD specialist and director of FINDtheADHDgirls, has long noticed the problem with trying to understand ADHD in girls by relying on the criteria in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5). And checklists based on boys, so prominent online, continually cause females to slip through the cracks. To promote earlier detection, Hammer developed an ADHD checklist for girls younger than 8 (see Hammer's story on page 18), when it's easier to train their neuroplastic brains with habits that help them cope.

Dana meets many of the criteria on Hammer's FINDtheADHDgirls checklist (see page 15). But would Dana's teachers flag her for ADHD? Would her pediatrician consider ADHD as an explanation for Dana's challenges? Or, would they just tack these struggles onto "poor parenting," given that Dana's symptoms are most apparent at home?

If they defer to the classic DSM-5 description, which requires symptoms to be observed in at least two settings, all bets are off. Because ADHD girls, such as the well-liked Dana, manage to use their social skills

➔ Young girls with ADHD often go unnoticed as they hide their symptoms from the world. However, this immense effort can lead to significant stress and anxiety. They may also exhibit heightened emotional responses and struggle to complete simple tasks, such as finishing homework or getting dressed, which can take an unusually long time.

to mask, or hide, their symptoms so they are not called out. The problem is that masking becomes increasingly challenging as social contexts become more nuanced and complex, especially as girls enter middle school. Given all the obstacles, if little Dana fails to get help before middle school, it's no surprise.

CATCHING THE TEENS

Diagnosis of teen girls is challenging. This is partly because the DSM-5, based on boys, sets a cutoff of age 12, even though girls can become far more symptomatic later on, after the onset of menses. And even though the pressures of middle school can make symptoms so much clearer.

Before puberty, girls' hormones are leveled, but once a girl gets her first period, hormones start to fluctuate, and this introduces neurochemical changes that can make masking ADHD symptoms more difficult. This is because the steep decline in estrogen that immediately precedes a girl's first period brings on a drastic decrease in the neurotransmitter, dopamine (and when dopamine levels are low, ADHD symptoms spike). Therefore, while girls may display subtle ADHD symptoms before age 12, their challenges often become way more apparent after their first period, leading to a referral (if they're lucky).

Then, of course, there are the social and emotional stressors. A major difference in ADHD symptoms between females and males involves what happens after a "failed" social situation. Females tend to care a great deal about others' perceptions of them and, although the subject is relatively new to ADHD research, females seem more likely than males to experience rejection sensitivity dysphoria (RSD), or extreme sensitivity to perceived or actual rejection or criticism.

This may be especially true in adolescence, as the social demands ramp up, and teen girls with ADHD suddenly find themselves drowning in the cognitively and sensorily overwhelming tasks of forming and maintaining friendships. Compared to neurotypical girls, ADHD girls display more difficulties with friendship formation and maintenance, with peer interactions and social skills, with bullying, and with behavior problems. ADHD girls are also more likely to be rejected by peers. These phenomena then tend to form a vicious cycle because these problems only produce more rejection and behavior problems over time.

By adolescence, undiagnosed "Dana" has built up a dense repertoire of self- and actual criticisms and she starts to live life in a way that is shaped by those hurtful social and emotional experiences. Others misunderstand her, but what's arguably worse is that she misunderstands herself.

Why is she such a rabble-rouser? Why can't she just be accepted like the other girls? Why is it that she now loses her cool in front of her teachers and peers (in addition to her parents)? How in the world did she allow herself to reach this futile and shameful point?

Females' ADHD symptoms appear to be much more emotionally laden than males', though this is not reflected in the current ADHD diagnostic criteria. After they accidentally commit a social faux pas,

← When teen girls begin menstruating, fluctuations in estrogen can worsen their ADHD symptoms, often leading to a long-overdue diagnosis.

teen girls are far likelier than their male counterparts to ruminate about the interaction and to feel ashamed. Females with ADHD take far longer to move past negative emotions, which they feel so intensely. Females also display greater levels of irritability and rapid mood shifts, often in response to social triggers.

These social and emotional challenges create a self-perpetuating cycle that intensifies and grows over time. Research shows that teen girls with ADHD are at a significantly higher risk of attempting suicide compared to teen girls without ADHD—especially if they are not being treated with stimulant medication. Although depression poses a significantly higher suicide risk, it's the impulsivity that often produces suicide attempts. What makes this narrative worse are the findings of a 2023 study showing that just a minority of pediatricians flag ADHD as a risk factor for suicide in teens.

WHEN YOU'RE A WOMAN

Because young girls and teens keep slipping between the cracks, we have a "lost generation" of women in their 30s and beyond who are only now getting diagnosed.

But the research needed to bring them out of the shadows is still profoundly inadequate. The problem goes beyond ADHD. Females have long been neglected in healthcare, especially in medical research. The issue was highlighted in 2011, when researchers Annaliese Beery, Ph.D., and Irving Zucker, Ph.D., published a paper examining the prevalence of females in animal research. They conducted their study because in 1993, when the National Institutes of Health (NIH) mandated that human clinical trials include women, the mandate did not mention animal studies. They found that although

Fact-Check Your Checklist

Many items on online ADHD self-assessment questionnaires can be misleading when evaluating girls. For a more accurate self-assessment, refer to Cynthia Hammer's FINDtheADHDgirls checklist. It includes some of the prototypical symptoms already recognized in boys. However, it also includes symptoms more common to girls. Pay attention to the categories of symptoms from Hammer's girl-friendly list, below:

EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION

○ Gets upset or angry about minor things
○ Overreacts to criticisms or perceived rejections
○ Cries easily or has meltdowns
○ Behaves well in school but is reactive and irritable upon arrival at home

SOCIAL AWKWARDNESS

○ Has difficulty making and keeping friends
○ Is aggressive and bossy with peers
○ Prefers solitary activities

ANXIOUS AND DEPRESSIVE BEHAVIORS

○ Fears making her teacher angry
○ Has trouble falling asleep at night
○ Makes negative comments about herself

HEIGHTENED SENSORY ISSUES

○ Is fussy about how clothing fits and feels
○ Gets overwhelmed by loud or visually overstimulating environments

It is easy to misattribute these symptoms to something else entirely. For girls, this usually surfaces as a diagnosis of anxiety or depression and the prescription of a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI), like Zoloft.

Then maybe there are the other, more stigmatizing, labels: oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) or disruptive mood dysregulation disorder (DMDD). Psychiatrists and psychologists may also consider autism before ADHD because of all the underrecognized overlap.

For example, girls with both autism and ADHD can have social challenges, sensory sensitivities, and heightened specific interests, though there are enough differences to make ADHD in girls distinct.

scientists increased inclusion of women in research, they neglected to include females in the animal studies that precede human ones. "The belief that nonhuman female mammals are intrinsically more variable than males and too troublesome for routine inclusion in research protocols is without foundation," the researchers wrote. They also noted that animal research including both sexes still failed to statistically compare males to females.

Based on such findings, the NIH mandated researchers to statistically compare males and females in both human and animal studies in 2016. But even after this policy was implemented, a 2020 study found that only about half of neuroscience studies (both animal and human) included both sexes. And of those, only 15% did a comparison.

Imagine a row of dominos, where each domino represents a different step in the process of arriving at a better understanding or treatment. Most of the time, the first domino in the chain is a study with rodents. Once it's established that rodents responded well to, say, a specific medication, the study might be replicated in humans. But what if most of the rodent research includes only males? In that case, human research that follows is intrinsically skewed or incomplete. If we don't check for sex differences in our medical research, how can clinicians pinpoint, let alone help, girls and women with ADHD?

We know that in adulthood, there is about a 1:1 ratio of males to females with ADHD, but in childhood, the gap is about 3:1, with males significantly outnumbering females. How does this make any sense, considering ADHD is a neurodevelopmental, brain-based, lifelong condition? Allow me to answer that question for you. It makes no sense at all.

The discrepancy suggests we are doing something wrong in our research, detection and treatment of ADHD in girls and women. We need to tear out the page describing ADHD in females and start from scratch. This does not mean using the current criteria to extrapolate that girls are simply more "inattentive." It means flipping to a blank page, sitting down with real women and asking them about their experiences. It means listening without assuming. For women who go undiagnosed, life has been painfully complicated. They need and deserve to receive individualized attention—and to be understood, at last. *

Gilly Kahn, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist specializing in neurodiversity and emotional regulation. When not seeing clients at Concierge Psychology in Atlanta—or mommying—she writes about neurodivergence for the lay public and is completing her upcoming book with the title of Allow Me to Interrupt: A Psychologist Reveals the Emotional Truth Behind Women's ADHD.

Make It Official

WHEN WE HAVE REAL CRITERIA FOR FEMALE ADHD, IT COULD EMBRACE IDEAS LIKE THIS.

An extremely helpful 2024 literature review published in the *European Journal of Medical and Health Sciences* sheds some light on the most prominent challenges of females with ADHD. We still need to create official criteria for girls and women, but when we do, these themes should be considered:

- Difficulties with regulating emotions
- Problematic social interactions/relationships, especially with handling conflict
- Reports of self-harm and suicidality
- Creativity and hyperfocus (being able to intensely focus on an area of interest)
- Hypersensitivity to criticism/rejection sensitivity
- Processing speed, memory, and other executive functioning challenges
- Poor balance/coordination and spatial awareness
- Masking and its residual effects, including depression or anxiety
- Any co-occurring condition, including physical or psychological diagnoses from OCD to depression

➔ Many women with ADHD have not been diagnosed until later in life—their 30s, 40s or beyond. Without understanding the root of their troubles, they have been unable to truly help themselves. For them, finally getting a diagnosis is a stepping stone to building a life they can embrace.

↗ Hopefully, this girl is seeing a bright future ahead through her paper telescope. Scientists are striving to find new methods that will allow diagnosis of ADHD in girls at younger ages, allowing earlier, life-changing treatment.

YOUNGER

The mission to diagnose girls by age 8

→ ***By Cynthia Hammer, M.S.W.***

Most of the time, ADHD is present from birth. In an ideal universe, diagnosis would happen shortly after that. Parents would know from the get-go that their daughter has a uniquely wired brain. This would give them time to learn about ADHD and how to best support their child well before she starts school. Even better would be screening mothers and fathers for ADHD prior to the birth of their first child. Then, knowing it is a highly inheritable condition, parents with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder would be on the lookout for the disorder in their offspring.

Neither scenario is poised to happen any time soon. So for my non-profit organization, the Inattentive ADHD Coalition and its big project, FINDtheADHDgirls.org, the fallback age for diagnosis is before 8. I should know how important early diagnosis is: I wasn't diagnosed until age 49, and I was forced to suffer the fallout of low self-esteem, underachievement and bewilderment that results from not understanding what's wrong or how to adapt. But we can save girls the heartache of all that negativity, giving them the fairest shot possible in life, if only we recognize them early and give them the help they need.

WE ROUTINELY DIAGNOSE YOUNG BOYS

Because we are more aware of ADHD in hyperactive, disruptive little boys, males have always been diagnosed more frequently than females. Boys are diagnosed two to three times more often than girls, and are on average diagnosed by age 7. When girls are diagnosed, it is frequently after 12 years of age—and often not until adulthood.

The underdiagnosis and delayed diagnosis of ADHD in girls takes a toll. Until they learn about their condition and get help, girls are at risk. Their family members, misunderstanding the cause of their behaviors, might admonish them for being lazy, unmotivated, troublesome, exasperating, always late, and messy. Girls internalize these messages and berate themselves with similar talk, resulting in low self-esteem and possibly self-hatred.

THE INAUTHENTIC LIFE

The negatives are exacerbated because girls mature earlier than boys and their social antennae are more attuned. Even as young as age 3, girls can read subtle social messages that they are unacceptable to their peers, and they struggle to modulate their behavior.

"I felt like an impostor. I masked and hid from others the extra time I took to do my work. Sometimes I didn't realize I was putting in much more effort than my peers," said a late-diagnosed woman talking about her childhood. "I fought to suppress my hyperactivity and contain my irritation and restlessness. My anxiety to be acceptable drove me. I was motivated to do well, to please others, particularly my parents, and I tried to be perfect, to perform well, but I was exhausted by all the effort it took."

This kind of masking, where a girl hides her symptoms from the world, can be a helpful strategy for getting along with others when purposely chosen. When a child feels forced to act in ways that don't align with her true self just to gain acceptance, it can harm her self-esteem and become emotionally exhausting to maintain. As girls with ADHD become more adept at masking their symptoms, discovering their condition becomes more difficult for the rest of us. But girls under age 8 tend to engage in less masking, which makes ADHD easier to recognize.

WHEN DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY JOIN IN

The longer a girl with ADHD goes undiagnosed, the more likely she is to develop the co-occurring conditions of depression and anxiety. Sometimes she may experience depression and anxiety as separate disorders, but often depression and anxiety result from her untreated ADHD. Many ADHD women report that they were treated for years for depression or anxiety, but the treatments didn't significantly help them until the underlying problem—their ADHD—was diagnosed and treated. Their depression resulted from their untreated ADHD issues—being late, being messy, being disorganized, and engaging in negative self-talk.

"I told myself I was bad and stupid and that no one would ever want to be my friend," said another late-diagnosed woman discussing what she went through as a child. "I knew I was a disappointment to my parents and that they were ashamed of me."

Anxiety in this group often results from attempting to always be perfect, believing that it is the only way to be acceptable to others. The child becomes a people pleaser, always anxious to do the right thing. With early diagnosis, a girl's ADHD can become less complicated, without co-occurring disorders, and therefore can become simpler to recognize and to treat.

→ Girls diagnosed with ADHD before age 8 will get a head start in dressing themselves, grooming themselves, and managing their personal needs.

Five ways to help your child stay on track in school.

- Pay special attention to routine, including mealtime, bedtime and homework time.
- Set up a homework nook or station where your daughter can do her work on a regular basis.
- Use timers to track homework, since ADHD children can lose track of time.
- Find her talents and help her pursue them so she feels good about herself.
- Help her to organize everything with colored folders and, when she is doing her homework, go through directions step by step with her to make sure she understands.

THE PLASTIC BRAIN

The brains of young children are more neuroplastic than those of older individuals, meaning they have a greater ability to form new synaptic connections. This enhanced neuroplasticity supports memory, flexibility and learning.

We are still gaining insight into the brain's neuroplasticity and its ability to discard old behaviors and learn new ones. When a child with an especially neuroplastic brain learns about her ADHD before age 8, she grows up putting in place and mastering the habits and structures that enable her to function at her highest level. She grows up more easily incorporating the behaviors that make her life easier because her neuroplastic brain creates the structural changes that support her new habits. The older she becomes without a diagnosis, the more challenging it is for her to learn new behaviors—and for her brain to incorporate them.

Stimulant medication also plays an important role. It increases the levels of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that is typically deficient in individuals with ADHD. By helping to balance the brain's unique wiring, these medications can make it easier for young girls to develop new habits.

GETTING TO A DIAGNOSIS

It saddens me when adults tell me how their parents or teachers could have seen their ADHD when they were children, if only they knew what to look for. We need to do a better job of educating parents and teachers about ADHD in girls.

The teachers' input, if they learn what to watch for, can be key. They get to observe children all day long in a structured setting while imposing numerous age-appropriate expectations for behavior. Parents, on the other hand, may unwittingly clue their child to perform certain tasks, from when to brush their teeth to when to put on their pajamas at bedtime, without realizing these are tasks a 7-year-old girl should be capable of performing without parental supervision.

The ADHD guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatricians, while allowing that younger children may be diagnosed with the condition in extreme circumstances, caution that most diagnoses shouldn't occur until the child is at least 6.

Clinicians often hesitate to diagnose ADHD until a child reaches age 7, when they can gather input from schools. At this age, children are also expected to read and complete other academic tasks, providing more information to support the diagnosis.

Children with ADHD might find learning certain behaviors more difficult than other children, but the earlier parents, teachers and therapists intervene and teach them helpful behaviors, the easier their lives will be. Benefiting from greater neuroplasticity, young brains acquire new knowledge more quickly and efficiently. So early diagnosis, along with implementing helpful strategies and nurturing self-esteem, will go far in helping girls with ADHD thrive. *

Cynthia Hammer, M.S.W., is the author of the book and audiobook Living With Inattentive ADHD.

→ By helping to address some of the challenges caused by ADHD, an early diagnosis allows girls to more fully enjoy the typical pleasures of childhood.

↓ ADHD is a lifelong diagnosis, but the teenage years offer a critical period of plasticity. During this time, girls can address challenges and develop new habits and skills that will set them up for success. Mastering these changes later in adulthood would be much more difficult.

FLOW
FLOW
FLOW
FLOW
EBLITE

TEEN SPIRIT

Many see adolescence as something we survive, but for ADHD girls, it's a time for growth and retraining the malleable brain.

→ ***By Gilly Kahn, Ph.D.***

My phone rang and our practice coordinator's name glowed on its screen. In that glimpse of a millisecond, I could predict her next words.

"I've got another challenging one for you."

It didn't matter where I worked. Everyone knew Dr. Kahn as the clinician who saw the "challenging" cases. With this in mind, it probably won't surprise you to learn that I work mainly with neurodivergent teens. Many of my colleagues labeled these cases "difficult," but I actually counted down the minutes until I could see these teens again.

One teen client, *Alex*, was nearly bald when she entered my office. There were some thin strands of hair still hanging on by a thread, mostly toward the back of her head. I didn't need to see her most recent psychological evaluation to tell that she struggled with trichotillomania (hair-pulling disorder), which occurs in conjunction with autism about 3.9% of the time, nearly double the rate in the typical population. What's more, 45% of people with trichotillomania also meet criteria for depression and 15% for ADHD.

Given that Alex already held diagnoses of autism, ADHD, and persistent depressive disorder (also known as dysthymia—a more prolonged and stable form of depression), the blatant hair loss didn't surprise me. The reason Alex was referred to me was because she had endured at least four different inpatient facilities over the course of a year before she finally ended up someplace that was even slightly knowledgeable about her specific presentation.

And—even then—at the point when she first confidently entered my office for outpatient therapy, Alex wasn't "fixed." She talked about suicide with a *lah-de-dah* easy-breezy flair, yet she wasn't actively suicidal. And yes, I know because I had to constantly assess for this.

When you look at the research, the numbers are clear. Females with ADHD (let alone ADHD and other comorbidities, including depression) are at a significantly higher risk for making a suicide attempt compared to females without ADHD—especially if they are not being treated with stimulant medication. Although depression poses a significant risk for suicide, it's the *impulsivity* that often produces suicide attempts.

But if *I* didn't talk to her about these topics—about death and dying, about the purpose of living, about suicide and having suicidal thoughts—in an open, nonjudgmental, nonthreatening, and caring way—*who would*? In the eyes of some therapists, Alex might be seen as a risk, unhinged, and even threatening to their professional license. She looked different. She was stubborn and unmotivated. But to me, Alex was a young human being unafraid to ask taboo questions, with the potential not just to survive but to flourish and grow.

> **"Instead of viewing teen girls with ADHD as people caught in a self-defeating loop of destructive behavior, it's time to capture the potential that adolescence confers."**
>
> ~ GILLY KAHN, PH.D., CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST, ATLANTA

POWER OF THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN

She was destabilized but also empowered by her teen brain. Just as humans experience a period in early childhood where their brains are impressionable and open to change, so too do they experience this malleability in adolescence.

Temple University psychologist and neuroscientist Laurence Steinberg, Ph.D., an expert on the teen brain, points to the *reminiscence bump*, which is the human tendency to clearly remember events from adolescence more than any other life period. Research shows that for most adults, episodic memories from their teens through their early 20s are the most quickly and vividly recalled. And not just painful times, but also trivial details: our favorite movies and music, or the dress color of the woman in the poster taped to our bedroom wall.

"The adolescent brain is extremely sensitive to experience," explains Steinberg, and this may hold especially for those with ADHD. As it turns out, the brain area most prone to change during adolescence is the prefrontal cortex, the region responsible for our higher-order executive functioning skills, including our ability to plan, organize, set and accomplish goals, and inhibit irrelevant or unhelpful sensory input and behaviors. In adolescence (especially in ADHD girls), our emotional circuits are tuned up and our executive functioning abilities are incomplete. This makes us more vulnerable to risk-taking, which can either be adaptive or maladaptive in adolescence—depending on how adolescents channel those urges.

In short, while adolescent girls struggle to regulate their emotional responses, girls with ADHD struggle even more because their brains sense a lot with even less robust machinery to "brake" or "halt" them from acting on those big feelings. Adults can help adolescents exercise the "brakes" of their prefrontal cortex during this sensitive and extremely important period of development.

I'm not saying it's *easy* to help teens do this. But instead of viewing teen girls with ADHD as people caught in a self-defeating loop of destructive behavior, it's time to capture the potential that adolescence confers. Instead of exacerbating their acute social awareness and rejection sensitivity with criticism, we should recognize that this period of development offers enormous room for growth.

For teen girls with ADHD at such high risk, that growth can be propelled by treatment with appropriate psychotherapy and meds. Supplementary estrogen can stabilize their mood. And, instead of stigmatizing stimulant medication or attempting to find work-arounds, let's look at the science: Study after study has pointed to more brain growth in areas commonly affected in ADHD in those who took stimulant medication to treat their symptoms over several years when young compared to those who did not.

Psychologist Russell Barkley, Ph.D., refers to this phenomenon as *neuropromotion,* because stimulant medication has been linked to neuronal growth across the entire brain, especially in regions underdeveloped in ADHDers—in some cases, to the point that ADHD brains were indistinguishable from neurotypical brains.

Instead of viewing adolescence as a period to "survive," it's high time we see the potential it holds for retraining the brain. Therapists and parents alike should capitalize on adolescence as a time to intervene, both in reparative *and* preventative ways. Adolescent girls with ADHD and co-occurring conditions—girls like "Alex"—deserve to be better understood and listened to, and they need treatments that apply what the research already shows. *

---

*Alex* is a false name used to protect client confidentiality. Specific details were omitted or changed for the same reason.

↓ Spending time in nature can help a teen girl with ADHD slow down and improve focus. If visiting a park or lake, or working with plants like the young woman here, isn't possible, simply having a view of nature from a window or playing on an open soccer field (as shown on the previous spread) can also be therapeutic.

+ RIDING THE ROLLER COASTER –

MENOPAUSE MADNESS

By Kimberly Quinn, Ph.D.

Despite the plummet in estrogen and dopamine that may intensify symptoms, women with ADHD can thrive in midlife.

Please don't shoot the messenger when I say menopause affects everything. *E-v-er-y-thing.* After we undergo "the change," estrogen levels plummet by 65%, which affects the uptake of dopamine from our already dopamine-deprived brains. These plummeting estrogen levels also lead to decreased levels of serotonin, another key player in mood regulation and focus. This can lead to the appearance of ADHD-like symptoms for our neurotypical midlife comrades.

Women already tagged with the ADHD label may become increasingly concerned about their symptoms getting worse rather than better. Those women who do not have this label and go through menopause may question whether they have been walking around with undiagnosed ADHD or if this is the foreshadowing of their future with dementia.

This is because decreasing estrogen causes these neurotransmitters to drop like a hot rock, which can result in greater difficulty concentrating, increased cognitive dysfunction, additional memory problems (if that's even possible), and reduced mental clarity.

Seriously?

For those of us already active (very active) members of the Fast Mind Club (high-functioning people who see ADHD as a creative advantage), this nonetheless amps up the challenges to our executive functioning systems. We may have managed the kids, the checkbook, adulting in general, and even a pandemic, but then—wham! This menopause-induced hormonal cocktail hits us like a tropical storm turned hurricane.

In addition to the other traits menopause offers, such as difficulty sleeping, mood swings, night sweats, weight gain, and a dry vagina, we now have an executive functioning system that has rusted over as well. Somehow, I feel that I can relate to the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*. One minute, he was doing so well and fervently headed on a mission to see the Wizard, and the next, he was completely frozen in place and waiting for someone to oil him so he could function again.

What's worse is that many female fast-minders are not aware of the menopausal madness that stirs up our executive functioning, so many women sadly jump back on the shame-train thinking that they have lost a grip after spending years trying so hard to develop new

> **"Menopause mimics ADHD symptoms. Neurotypical midlife women may experience some of the cognitive challenges faced by women with ADHD."**
>
> ~ KIMBERLY QUINN, PH.D.

routines and strategies for managing our wonderfully wild minds.

Thankfully, with all these downers due to aging and hormonal changes, there is one big blessing in the mess. The number one superpower of ADHD is our enhanced ability for creativity due to the nature of our wandering minds. (See "Going With the Flow" on page 82.) Midlife is a great time for female fast-minders to throw caution to the wind and dive into something new and exciting. The shiny object that grabbed ME was starting a YouTube channel on topics related to well-being. I was hooked immediately and have had a blast ever since. I am also designing a treehouse just for me, kind of like a "she shed," only it will be in a "she-tree."

Here are 10 suggestions to help you thrive through menopausal madness:

1/ Ignore the judgers.
Midlife women really don't care what people think at this stage anyway. Embrace it.

2/ Seek higher ground.
If the judgers somehow sneak under your radar, seek higher ground immediately. This means finding someone who is a fan of you (and a great listener), who can tell you how amazing you are. Also, remember that when anyone criticizes or judges, it says everything about the person judging and nothing about us. Don't let them stick a pin in your happy bubble.

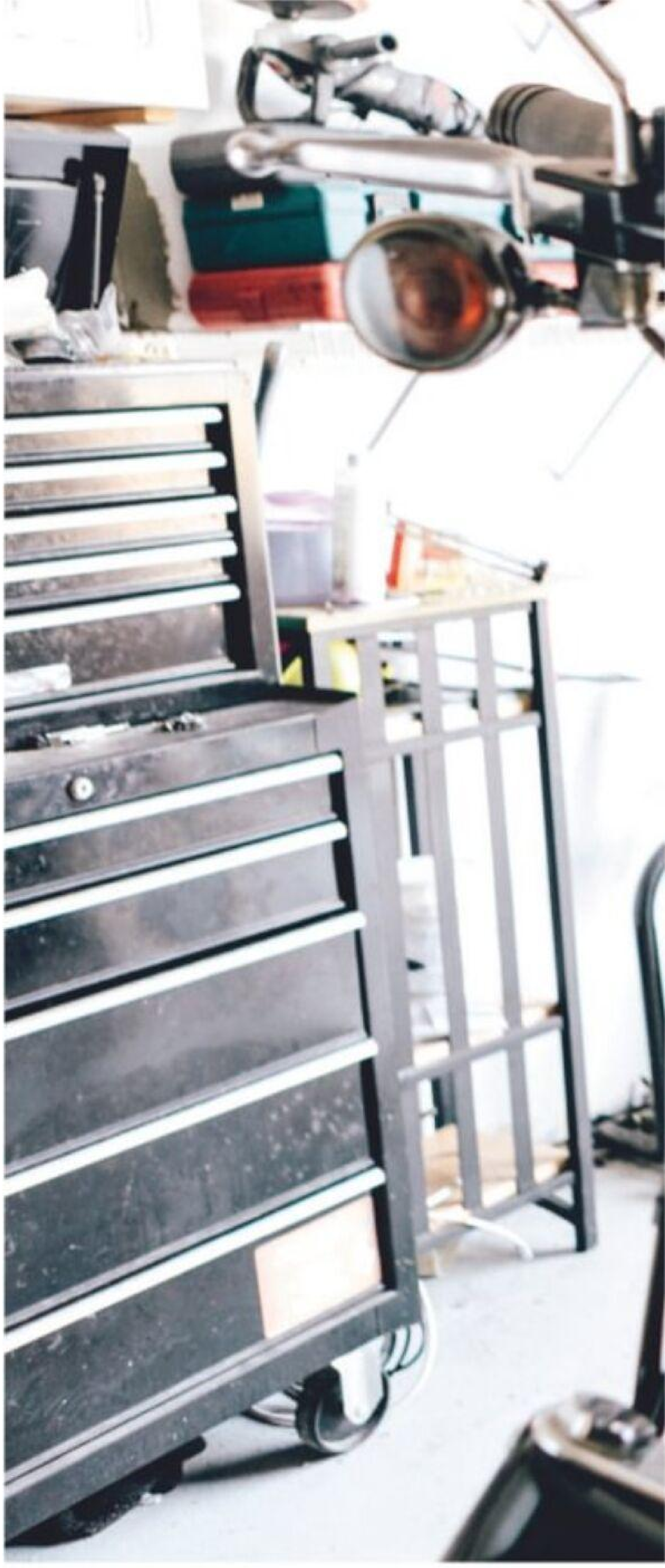
3/ Realize that you are gifted.
You have a wild and wonderful mind that is also gifted with very natural creativity—ADHD's biggest superpower. Fast mind. Big ideas. There are lots of very successful and famous people out there who are in the Fast Mind Club. Truth.

4/ Remember that you are fun to be around.
We have a great sense of humor; we're often the life of the party. Boring people are jealous. Let 'em be.

5/ Remember that you are forgiving.
For the most part, we tend to get over things quickly. We are kind of like a thunderstorm rolling over the beach. It's fast and furious, though also over quickly. Plus, there's a good chance that we won't remember what happened anyway.

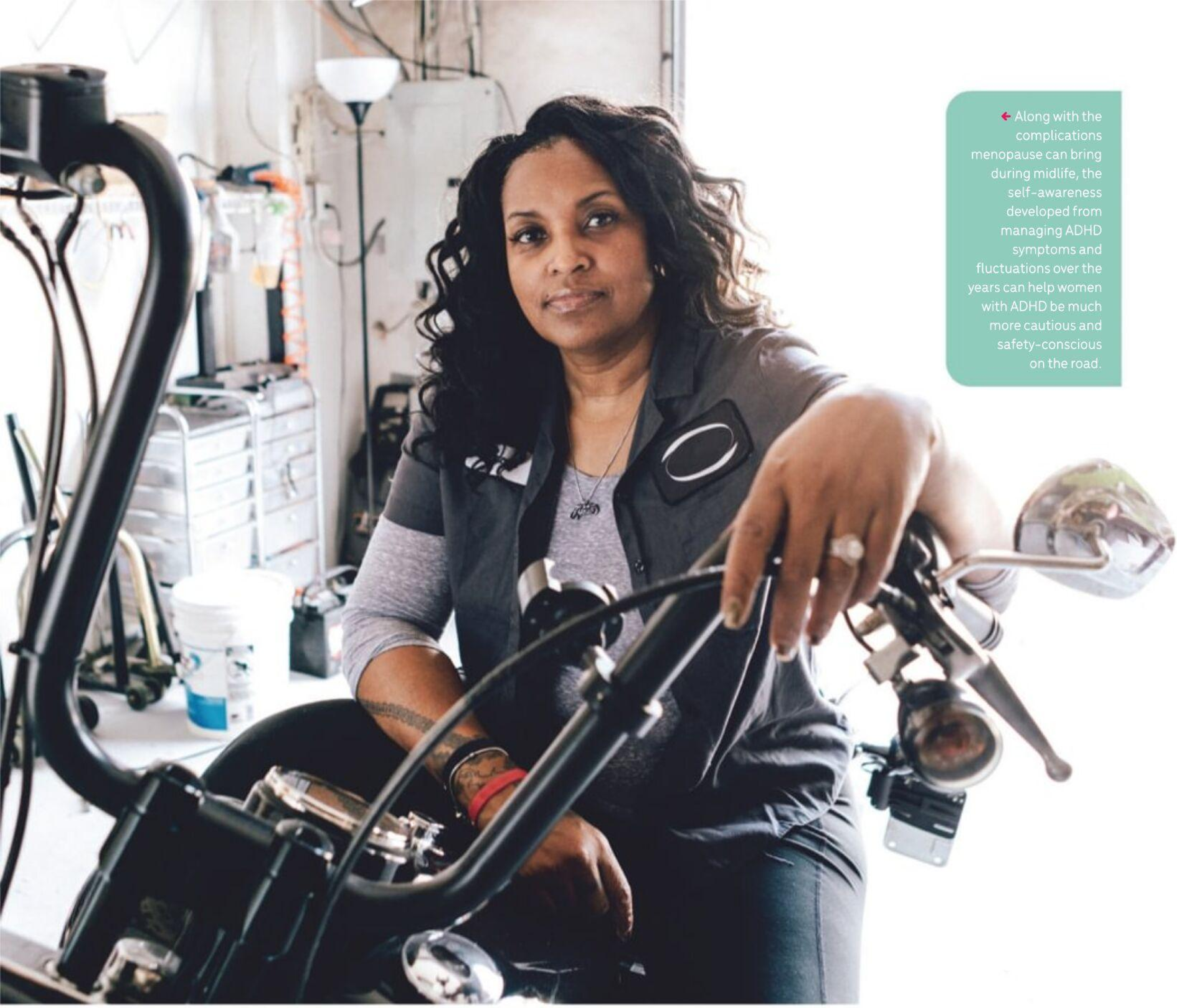
6/ Do what you need to do.
As long as it does not interfere with the path of someone else, do whatever you need to do to manage your day.

7/ Beam me up, Scotty!
If you find yourself reaching the boiling point, get out of dodge before you erupt. Any excuse is fine: going to the restroom, concern about a potential apocalypse, or the need to fine-tune your mental telepathy skills before you lose the signal.



8/ Call in the troops.
Have a chat with your partner, family, and/or friends. Explain to them what is going on with this hormonal cocktail that has now joined up with your amazing mind. Ask for kindness and support. Communication is key, and it can limit unwanted negativity and replace it with compassion. They may also offer help with certain tasks that are hard for us.

9/ Embrace your interest-based nervous system.
Unlike neurotypicals, we run on high-octane passion. Perhaps you



← Along with the complications menopause can bring during midlife, the self-awareness developed from managing ADHD symptoms and fluctuations over the years can help women with ADHD be much more cautious and safety-conscious on the road.

have a children's book that you've been holding in for years. Have a new idea for a unique invention or business venture? A trip to the moon or an unpioneered planet? Embrace this.

10/ **Set the bar at doing your best.** Having the bar set at doing your best each day is one you can always reach. Be understanding and loving toward yourself. Say positive affirmations each night for what went well during the day.

This is what we know for sure: Menopausal madness is caused by plummeting levels of estrogen that had once been our friend, leading to further depletion of the neurotransmitters dopamine and serotonin. This throws a wrench into the executive functioning system, much like a computer with expired malware is overtaken by a virus.

Menopause itself mimics ADHD symptoms, and what I call "estrogen-abandonment" can lead to a gamut of cognitive issues, female midlifers in the Fast Mind Club are more vulnerable to exacerbated symptoms.

Here's the good news: Midlife is also a great time for women as we become very self-aware, confident and authentic. Also, we are all too familiar with the hormonal roller coaster after all of those years of menses. This hormonal cocktail cannot only be managed but embraced. Ladies, this is not our first rodeo. We can take the reins.

Female fast-minders are bold, badass, and incredibly creative! *

Kimberly Quinn, Ph.D., a professor at Champlain College, teaches cognitive psychology and mindcraft. This story was originally published in Psychology Today.

THE CAMP GIRLS

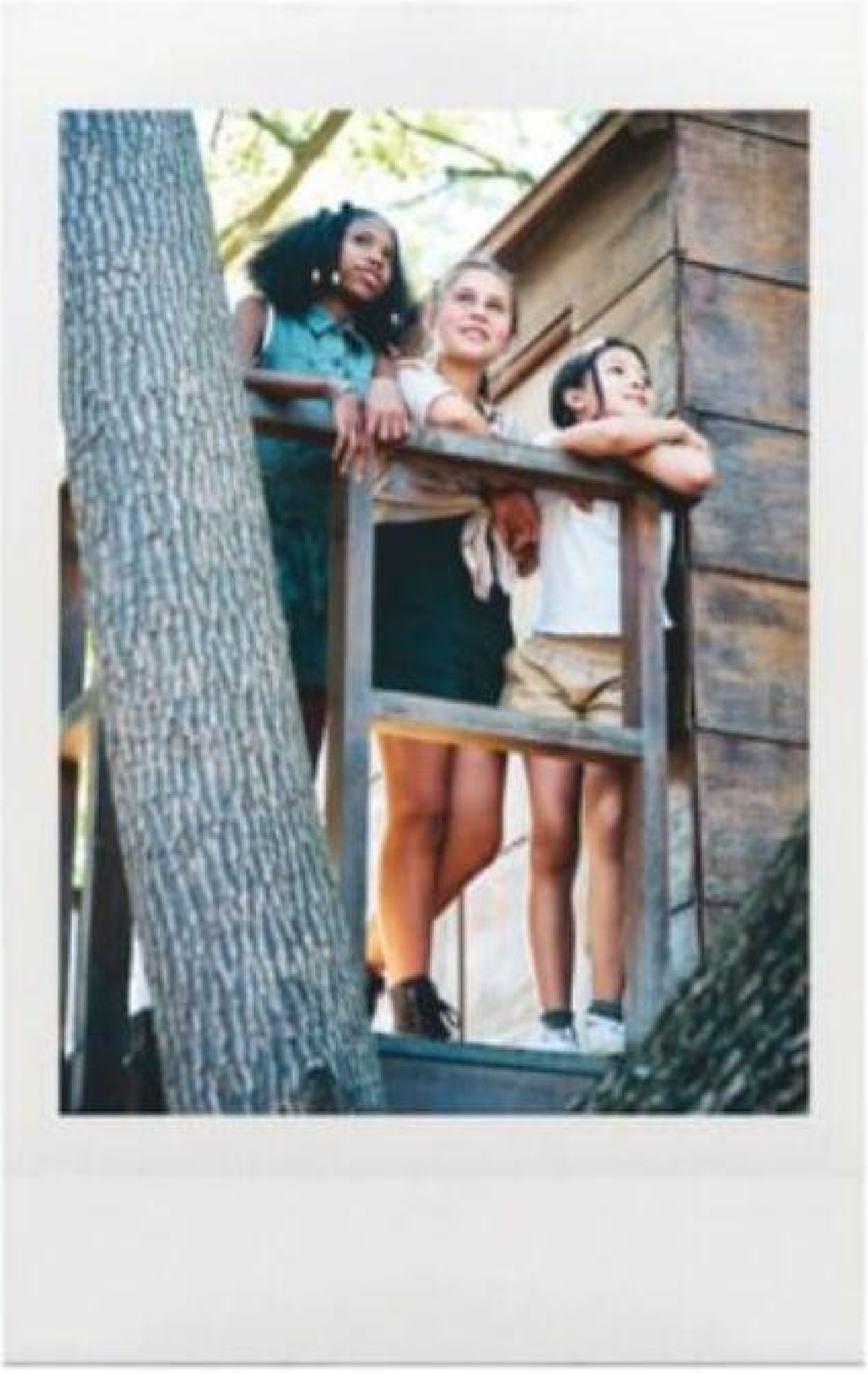
↑ ADHD in girls often presents with impulsivity and a kind of chattiness, or verbal hyperactivity, as opposed to the wilder physical unleashing often observed in boys who have been diagnosed.

Developmental psychologist Stephen Hinshaw has spent 25 years studying the same group of girls from his summer program. Here's what his findings mean for parents and schools.

→ ***By Davia Sills***

Developmental psychologist Stephen Hinshaw believed in studying children in their natural environment and real-life situations, rather than in the lab. So, in the '90s, he launched a summer camp program to gather information about boys with ADHD. It was a time when most teachers, parents, and even clinicians believed that ADHD was just a diagnosis for males. And yet every year, they received inquiries from parents of girls who wanted their children to participate as well. Seeing a rare opportunity, Hinshaw applied for a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) in the late 1990s, at a moment when people were noticing the lack of medical and psychological research that included females. The result: one of the longest-running, most comprehensive investigations into the development of girls with ADHD, and the source of much of the documentation about their lives, challenges, and gifts today.

In his seminal Berkeley Girls with ADHD Longitudinal Study (BGALS), 140 girls who had been carefully diagnosed with ADHD and a control group of 88 neurotypical girls—both ethnically and socioeconomically diverse and aged 6 through 12—attended a five-week summer camp. The collected data included behavioral observations, individualized testing, and input from other campers and participating adults. The researchers followed up with the girls well into adulthood, resulting in a gold mine of new information about how ADHD affects girls' lives and relationships over time. Hinshaw explained some of the most important findings to senior editor Davia Sills.



Q/ How did you come to study girls with ADHD at a time when most said only boys could be diagnosed?

Thirty years ago, my team and I wrote a grant to the National Institute of Mental Health to use our camp—a summer day program that we used to study boys with ADHD—to study a sample of girls with ADHD. It's one thing to do an assessment in a clinic or a lab. It's another to have counselors and observers and videotapes on a playground or in a classroom. You get a sense of natural behavior. Clinic-based assessments are more sterile. They can tell you whether the kid has a diagnosis of ADHD, but not a lot about the context for their behaviors.

Q/ What makes the information you gathered different from studies in a lab?

Except for a couple of cases of siblings who attended, the girls didn't know one another, so they met on the first day of camp. After that, [we] used a method called peer sociometrics, [which captures the first impressions kids have of each other], and is very revealing of how reputations get formed. We studied a first impression made by girls with ADHD that persists over the weeks.

Q/ How else was the study unusual?

You only get grants for five years at a time, and we thought if we could run these summer camps and combine the peer impressions, testing, and observations, we'd learn a lot about girls with ADHD. No one had done this kind of study before. Five years later, we got funding to do our five-year follow-up. And we've just finished our 25-year follow-up, so all the girls are now in their 30s. We've followed the vast majority of them over time, and our findings have helped inform the field about what girls with ADHD are like, as well as what occurs during adolescence and into emerging and later adulthood.

Q/ Can you tell me something important that your study revealed about girls?

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* used to say you couldn't get a diagnosis of ADHD unless the symptoms were present before the age of 7, which biased it toward hyperactive symptoms and oppositional behavior, and boys got noticed more. If you're a girl and you have ADHD, you're likely to have a form that isn't as noticeable. You have to do a careful assessment, and most teachers aren't trained to do that, so we see later recognition in girls.

↗ The secret lives of girls: Studying children with and without ADHD at camp has allowed psychologists to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences as they participated in various activities and interacted with friends and peers.

Q/ What should a parent know? What should a teacher know?

Number one, the risk of developing ADHD is much more inside one's genes than it is about one's family or school life. Forty percent of kids with ADHD have parents who have ADHD, whether diagnosed or not; it's a genetic legacy. Second, the fundamental issue in ADHD is that the neurotransmitter dopamine doesn't work as efficiently as it does in people who are neurotypical. Not only are genes largely responsible, but kids with ADHD who get called lazy or childish or immature or stupid are neurologically younger than their peers; given the issues with dopamine flow, they take longer to develop intrinsic motivation for a task. You've got a genetic vulnerability compounded by the kid feeling stupid. The kid feels the parents don't love them. They get yelled at by teachers.

> "Learning to work with this kind of quick-paced mind and the ability to hyperfocus can be a strength, as long as you have the right skills and tools."
>
> ~ STEPHEN HINSHAW, PH.D., DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGIST

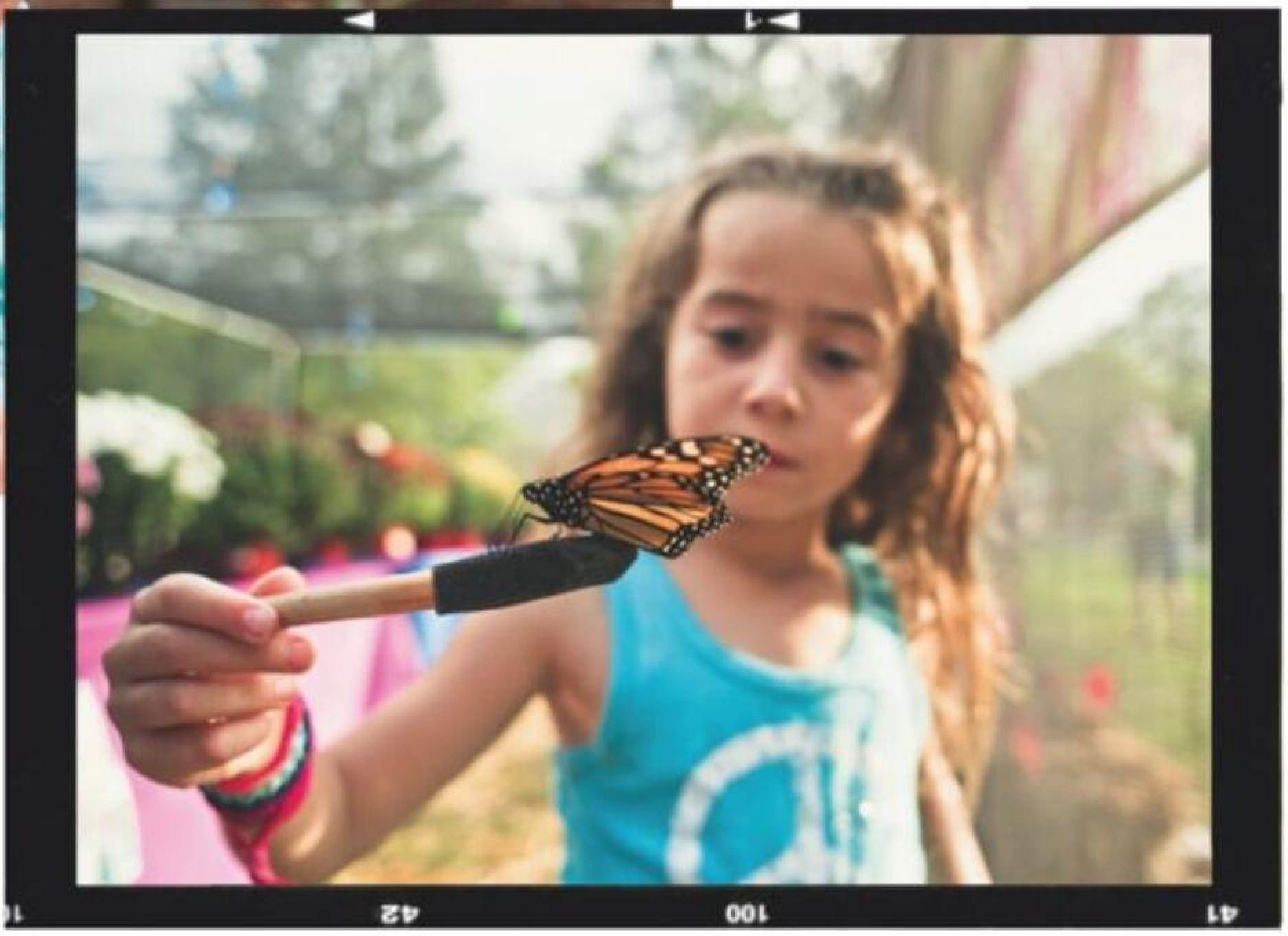
Q/ What should you do if you suspect this is an issue for a daughter of yours?

Get a thorough assessment. Most pediatricians aren't trained in behavioral or attentional problems—and the clock is ticking.

Q/ Once there's a diagnosis, what helps most to stop that ticking clock and give them a shot at success?

The message is plain: Parents can take away a lot of the self-blame but not the responsibility. Consulting with the teacher and getting the teacher educated about ADHD makes the environments more supportive and can change the course of their lives. We know across many studies that the right dose of medication and behavioral supports work better than either one alone.

DAYTON
BRIANNA
DRAKE
QUINN
MIKEY



Q/ Based on your camp studies, what behavioral supports do you recommend?

The best behavioral programs (include) parent management training (PMT), and then breaking skills into small steps. Having discrete rewards and coordinating the teacher's reward program with the one at home can make a big difference in the lives of kids with ADHD. Most of the world says you start with PMT and then, if it's not working, you add medication. But the medications for ADHD help to regulate the flow of dopamine in your brain, while the behavioral treatments provide this regular boost of reinforcement to get the skills more solidified. Medicine alone doesn't improve your math or reading—doesn't really improve your friendships. You're less bothersome, but you need to learn social skills. You need to learn academics. And parents need to adopt an authoritative parenting style, which combines high warmth and love for your child with clear structure and defined limits.

Q/ These supports are important for boys and girls alike, but what specifically do girls need?

A lot of it has to do with training teachers that ADHD is more than the Tom Sawyer syndrome—the white, middle-class boy who's misbehaving. ADHD occurs in every race and ethnicity. It occurs across all social classes. It clearly does occur in girls. Parents and teachers need to learn about the more subtle forms of ADHD, the inattentive forms that are more prevalent in girls than they are in boys. We know from our BGALS study that compared to boys with ADHD, in the teen years, girls tend to develop depression and low self-esteem, and, tragically, they are much more likely than neurotypical girls and more likely than boys with ADHD to cut or self-mutilate, and to make attempts on their lives. We want people to know that getting an early diagnosis, which is harder to accomplish in girls, may help head off these devastating outcomes that we've seen.

Q/ What else are we missing?

One of the symptoms of ADHD is hyperfocus. So, ADHD is misnamed. It's not an attention *deficit*. It would be really great if we recognized that the hyperactivity in boys may show up as hyper-verbality in girls and women. It's another way of seeing ADHD. Learning to work with this kind of quick-paced mind and the ability to hyperfocus can be a strength, as long as you have the right skills and tools and strong enough self-esteem to apply them effectively.

Q/ Do you have any favorite tools for learning to thrive with ADHD when girls become teens?

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is valuable. You can set up a reward chart for your 7-year-old daughter on the refrigerator, but not for your 17- or 27-year-old daughter. As opposed to behavioral therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy is about setting your own goals, rewarding yourself, learning organizational tools and strategies, and learning anger management. We used to think that ADHD stopped when you hit puberty, because the hyperactive, squirmy behavior went underground. But for teens and young adults and even older adults with ADHD, CBT really works well, especially when it's paired with the right dose of medication. *

PART
2

The Best Treatments and Therapies

GIRLS AND WOMEN CAN BENEFIT FROM NEW FINDINGS ABOUT ESTROGEN, MEDS FOR FOCUS, AND EVIDENCE-BASED PSYCHOTHERAPIES TO QUIET THE MIND.

← Those with ADHD produce less dopamine. This deficit contributes to developmental delays in childhood and difficulties with executive function in adulthood. But carefully-dosed treatment from a skilled psychopharmacologist can improve their symptoms.

Balancing the Brain

FROM STIMULANTS TO HORMONES, ADHD IN GIRLS AND WOMEN CAN BE PARTIALLY TREATED WITH MEDS.

→ ***By Pamela Weintraub***

Once ADHD is diagnosed, you'll find that most physicians see medication as a first-line treatment. It's understandable that people new to ADHD might balk, especially when it comes to psychopharmaceuticals for children; yet the drugs can be a powerful tool for increasing focus and decreasing hyperactivity by adjusting the level of dopamine in the brain when there is an imbalance. On the other hand, most experts contend that medication alone, without behavioral or cognitive therapy, is going to be insufficient for all but the mildest of cases—the therapies work best in tandem.

THE DOCTOR IS IN

The first step in getting a prescription is going through a thorough assessment, according to Christy Duan, M.D., a New York City psychiatrist and clinical assistant professor at NYU Langone Health, who treats patients ranging from children as young as 4 to seniors in their 70s. "I might ask about other conditions, such as depression, psychotic symptoms, manic symptoms, OCD, anxiety, panic, the broad range of the DSM-5, to be sure I'm not missing anything," she says. "And if it seems like the attention issues are the primary component, we will focus on that."

Duan treats most of her patients through a scientifically guided process of trial and error, in which medicines are started at a very low dose and observed for side effects and effectiveness over time—and if ineffective, switched to something else. (See pages 38–39 for a description of medication categories.)

She usually starts with a stimulant, which increases dopamine in the brain. For children and teens, she initially looks to a methylphenidate such as Ritalin, Concerta or Focalin because of the lower side-effect profile. For adults, Duan usually starts with a stimulant medicine in the amphetamine class, including Adderall and Vyvanse.

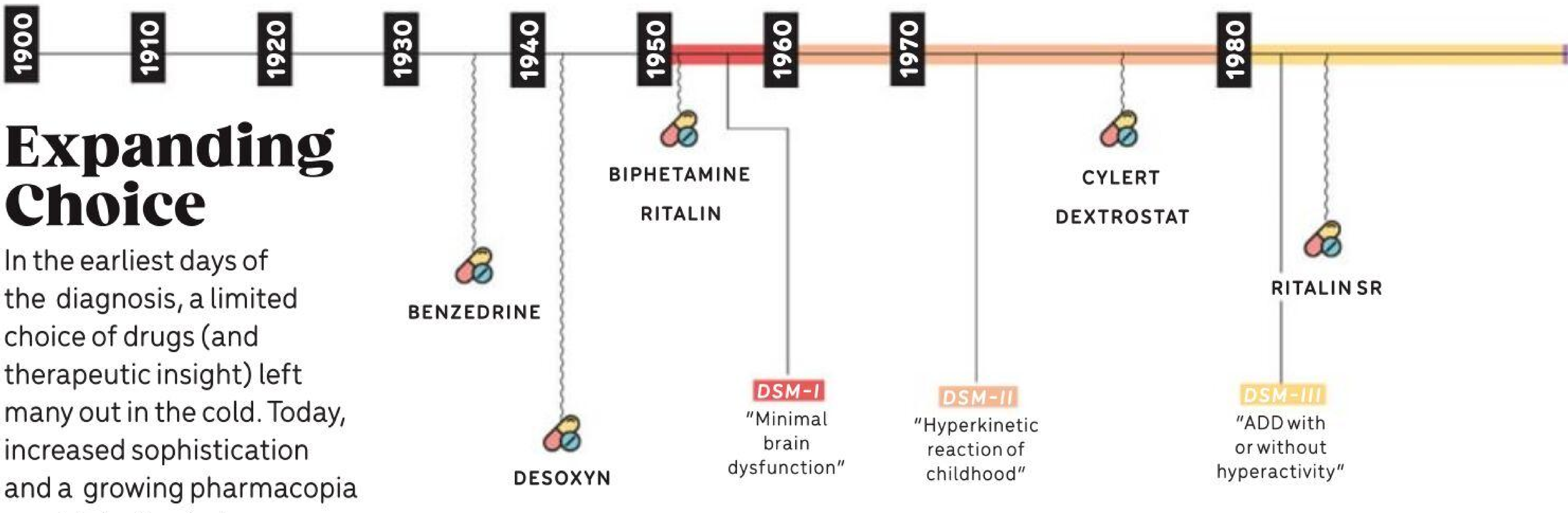
She tries to use long-acting formulations whenever possible. "I think that it's helpful to start on a medicine that lasts for the entire day," she says, "but if someone's feeling a little bit nervous about medicines, or doesn't want to fully commit to nine hours, or some side effect makes them feel uncomfortable, I might start them on a short-acting stimulant that lasts just three or four hours."

IF STIMULANTS DON'T WORK

If the stimulants don't work, Duan then looks to nonstimulants such as clonidine and guanfacine, which inhibit the sympathetic nervous system, lowering blood pressure and putting some breaks on the fight-or-flight system. These medications "help calm the body" and appear to boost the function of the prefrontal cortex,

Expanding Choice

In the earliest days of the diagnosis, a limited choice of drugs (and therapeutic insight) left many out in the cold. Today, increased sophistication and a growing pharmacopia provide better help.



aiding focus and executive functions such as planning.

Jasmine Sawhne, M.D., a psychiatrist in Los Angeles, meanwhile, also looks to the antidepressant Wellbutrin "if there's a component of depression and/or anxiety. Then we can target a lot of different things with one medication," she adds. Sawhne asks her patients for a complete blood and urine analysis. If she finds the patient is smoking marijuana, she will prescribe a nonstimulant because, she says, marijuana and stimulants "can cancel each other out."

After a medication shows promise, and a patient "is able to focus and go about their days in a more efficient way, we work on titrating the medication to an effective dose," adds Duan. Both doctors follow patients over the months and years, increasing the dose or making other adjustments if focus or performance slips.

DEALING WITH SIDE EFFECTS

The next step is tempering side effects such as appetite suppression, difficulty sleeping and irritability, especially seen when the patient rebounds as the medication wears off. "Some kids are more affected by appetite suppression, and I will try to make changes so they're eating a bigger breakfast or dinner, or having a snack throughout the day, even if they're not that hungry, so that way they can grow to their full potential,"says Duan.

Sawhne finds, not surprisingly, that people on a stimulant medication may have a lot of trouble falling asleep at night. "I advise people to take the medication first thing in the morning, as early as possible to start their day, so that at night, it's out of their system and they're able to relax."

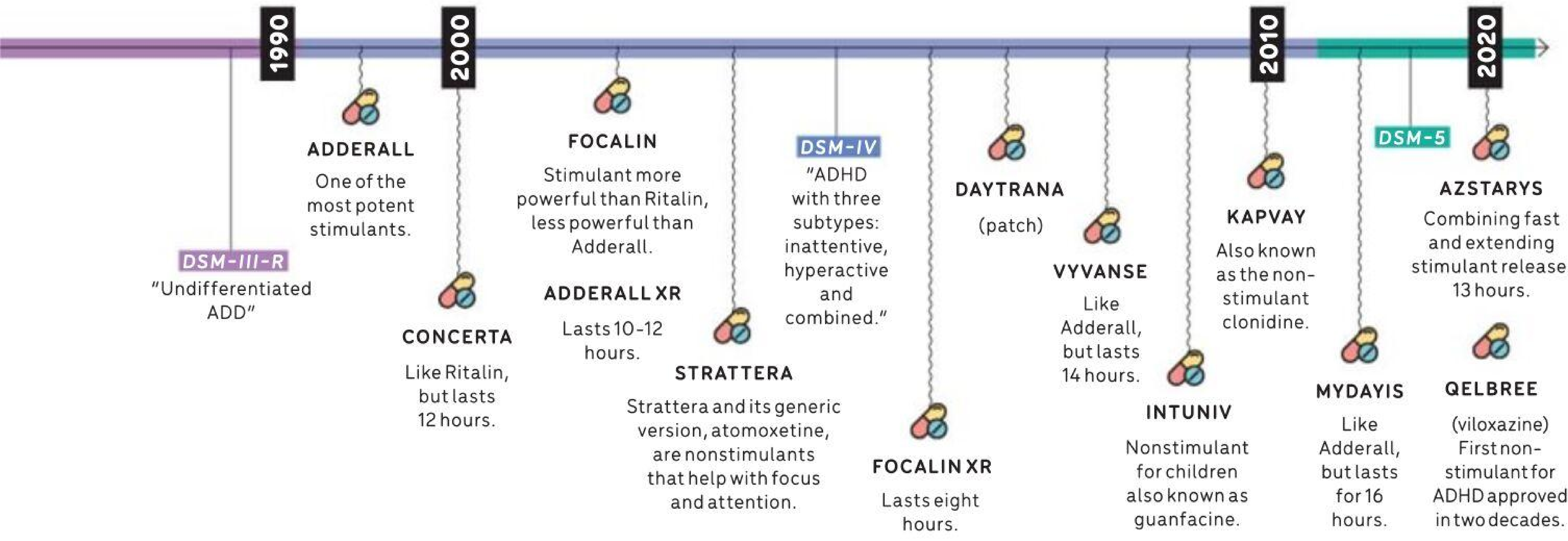
TREATMENT COCKTAILS

Sometimes side effects become more complex or severe, to the point where a person with ADHD feels as if no medicine will work. One patient we interviewed, we'll call him Eric, went through all the medication options—and each one seemed to cause a different rare, untenable side effect, from urination problems to vomiting to breathing issues. Finally Eric sought the help of one of the top psychopharmacologists in the United States. That doctor treated his ADHD with small doses of three medications—Qelbree (generic name viloxazine), a nonstimulant; armodafinil, usually used for narcolepsy; and Trintellix (generic name vortioxetine), generally prescribed for depression. After years of pushing through without any successful medicine for his profoundly disabling ADHD, Eric was finally able to get a treatment that worked; he even successfully fought with his insurance company to have it all covered.

ARE YOU ON THE FENCE?

The controversy over medicine for ADHD has raged for decades. Those on the front lines say that it's best for the doctor and patient to do a cost-benefit analysis before deciding on whether to use pharmaceuticals or rely on cognitive therapies alone.

"Over the long haul, skill-building; finding the right school or job; finding the right teacher, mentor or mate; and developing what we call a life rife with positive connections to people, activities and purpose matter the most" in living successfully with ADHD, Edward Hallowell, M.D., and John Ratey, M.D., explain in *ADHD 2.0*. But "in the short term, nothing gives the bang for your buck that medication can." If prescribed and taken properly, the meds can sometimes work "within an hour of taking them," the doctors note. (For more on tapering off pharmaceuticals, see "Can You Go Without?" on page 46.) *



DSM-III-R
"Undifferentiated ADD"

ADDERALL
One of the most potent stimulants.

CONCERTA
Like Ritalin, but lasts 12 hours.

FOCALIN
Stimulant more powerful than Ritalin, less powerful than Adderall.

ADDERALL XR
Lasts 10-12 hours.

STRATTERA
Strattera and its generic version, atomoxetine, are nonstimulants that help with focus and attention.

DSM-IV
"ADHD with three subtypes: inattentive, hyperactive and combined."

FOCALIN XR
Lasts eight hours.

DAYTRANA
(patch)

VYVANSE
Like Adderall, but lasts 14 hours.

INTUNIV
Nonstimulant for children also known as guanfacine.

KAPVAY
Also known as the non-stimulant clonidine.

MYDAYIS
Like Adderall, but lasts for 16 hours.

DSM-5

AZSTARYS
Combining fast and extending stimulant release, 13 hours.

QELBREE
(viloxazine) First non-stimulant for ADHD approved in two decades.

Types of Medicine

THREE CATEGORIES OF PRESCRIPTION PSYCHOPHARMACEUTICALS TYPICALLY TREAT THOSE WITH ADHD.

* **STIMULANTS** The first-line medicines used for ADHD and the true gold standard include Ritalin (methylphenidate) and drugs derived from that as well as amphetamines, the most popular of which is Adderall. Other popular stimulant medications include Vyvanse, Concerta and Focalin XR. Despite the name "stimulant," for ADHD patients these drugs have a calming and focusing effect. They work by increasing levels of the neurotransmitters dopamine and norepinephrine, which powerfully boost attention and motivation. At the right dose, stimulants can work almost immediately. They are controlled substances, however, and federally regulated because of their addictive potential; so the ADHD diagnosis must be extremely solid before a doctor will prescribe. While stimulants do not work for everyone, studies show that 70%-80% of people with ADHD respond to these drugs.

* **NONSTIMULANTS** Sometimes stimulants can cause intolerable side effects or may just not be effective, and when that happens, doctors turn to nonstimulants, which also increase the neurotransmitter norepinephrine in the brain. These medicines, including Qelbree and clonidine, can take up to four weeks to start working, like many other psychopharmaceuticals. If you see a provider who is an experienced psychopharmacologist,they may prescribe a stimulant with a nonstimulant together to heighten the effect.

* **ANTIDEPRESSANTS** Finally, if a stimulant or nonstimulant approved specifically for ADHD is ineffective or contraindicated—in the case of stimulants, perhaps because you have cardiovascular risk—your psychiatrist may prescribe an antidepressant. This type of usage is off-label for ADHD, but nonetheless has helped many a patient who cannot take the other drugs. But beware: Antidepressants that impact the neurotransmitter serotonin (the SSRI's or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) are not effective here and may backfire, increasing symptoms. Instead, doctors look to antidepressants such as Wellbutrin (bupropion), which increases dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain.

The Estrogen Equation

WHEN THE HORMONE FALLS OFF OR FLUCTUATES, REPLACEMENT THERAPY MAY HELP.

→ ***By Christy Duan, M.D.***

Many women have long battled challenging ADHD symptoms with limited treatment options —but as research has advanced, estrogen has become part of the arsenal, adding another layer of help. A growing body of literature has demonstrated a relationship between hormonal fluctuations and ADHD symptoms. Dwindling estrogen potentially leads to worsening ADHD symptoms, and treatments such as oral contraceptive pills or hormone replacement can be a solution. This is especially relevant to those born female because hormone patterns vary during puberty, the menstrual cycle, pregnancy and perimenopause, leading to alleviation or worsening of ADHD symptoms, depending on estrogen levels at the time.

WHEN THE SEX HORMONES KICK IN

Puberty typically begins between ages 8 and 13 in females. During this time of sexual maturation, the brain produces follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) and luteinizing hormone (LH), which then travel to the ovaries to trigger production of the sex hormones estrogen and progesterone. These sex hormones lead to both psychological and physical changes, such as breast development and menstruation. Estrogen also affects neurotransmitters such as dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin—which impact mood, attention and cognition.

Fluctuations in estrogen could help to explain why girls with ADHD may have higher levels of impairment than boys with ADHD. Furthermore, adolescent girls with ADHD have a 2.5 times higher risk for major depressive disorder compared to girls without ADHD. Adolescent girls with ADHD develop depression at an earlier age, have longer and more severe depressive episodes, and have higher rates of suicidality and psychiatric hospitalizations.

THE IMPACT OF ESTROGEN VARIES FROM ONE WOMAN TO THE NEXT

Research has shown that people with ADHD have lower levels of certain neurotransmitters, including dopamine and norepinephrine, in certain parts of the brain, playing havoc with their attention, motivation, and quest for pleasure. For such brains, the fallout of fluctuating hormones can be profound. In a 2024 paper in *Hormones and Behavior*, authors describe what they call the "Multiple Hormone Sensitivity Theory," where some women are particularly sensitive to fluctuations in estrogen and its effects on dopamine in the brain.

When decreases in estrogen affect dopamine in the prefrontal cortex, the result can be impaired executive and cognitive functions and lower emotional control.

UNDERSTANDING THE CYCLES

The newest studies show that some women have "estrogen withdrawal sensitivity"—a particularly destabilizing reaction to the ebb and flow of the hormone. As the menstrual cycle progresses, they may experience three types of sensitivities during the three discrete phases, exacerbating symptoms of ADHD:

1/ In the **luteal phase**, after ovulation, the follicle that released the mature egg forms a corpus luteum, a group of cells that produce progesterone to line the uterus and prepare it for pregnancy. The steady rise in progesterone, in turn, stimulates estrogen to prime the uterine environment for an embryo to implant. During this phase, women may experience hypersensitivity, increased irritability, interpersonal reactivity, high arousal negative affect (anger/anxiety), and sensory sensitivities due to metabolites of progesterone

2/ If the egg isn't fertilized, women enter the **perimenstrual phase**, in which the body sheds the uterine lining during menstruation; in this part of the cycle, researchers have documented inattention, negative affect (depression), anhedonia (lack of pleasure), avoidance, anxiety and suicidality, all due to the decrease in estrogen.

➔ Some women with ADHD find their symptoms worsen during spikes in estrogen. To manage this, some use birth control pills to stabilize hormone levels, while others report that estrogen patches are effective for improving memory and maintaining focus.

3/ In the **periovulatory phase**, right around ovulation, estrogen increases, and with it, reward-seeking behavior. But look out as well for a potential increase in hyperactivity/impulsivity after ovulation.

During pregnancy, women produce higher levels of estrogen and progesterone. But they vary in their sensitivity to these hormones. Some women thrive during this period, while others experience deficits in cognitive functioning, memory and executive functioning—often referred to as "pregnancy brain."

Studies on women who have reached menopause, whether due to natural processes or medical intervention, on the other hand, show a link between low estrogen and declines in verbal memory, as well as increased risk of dementia.

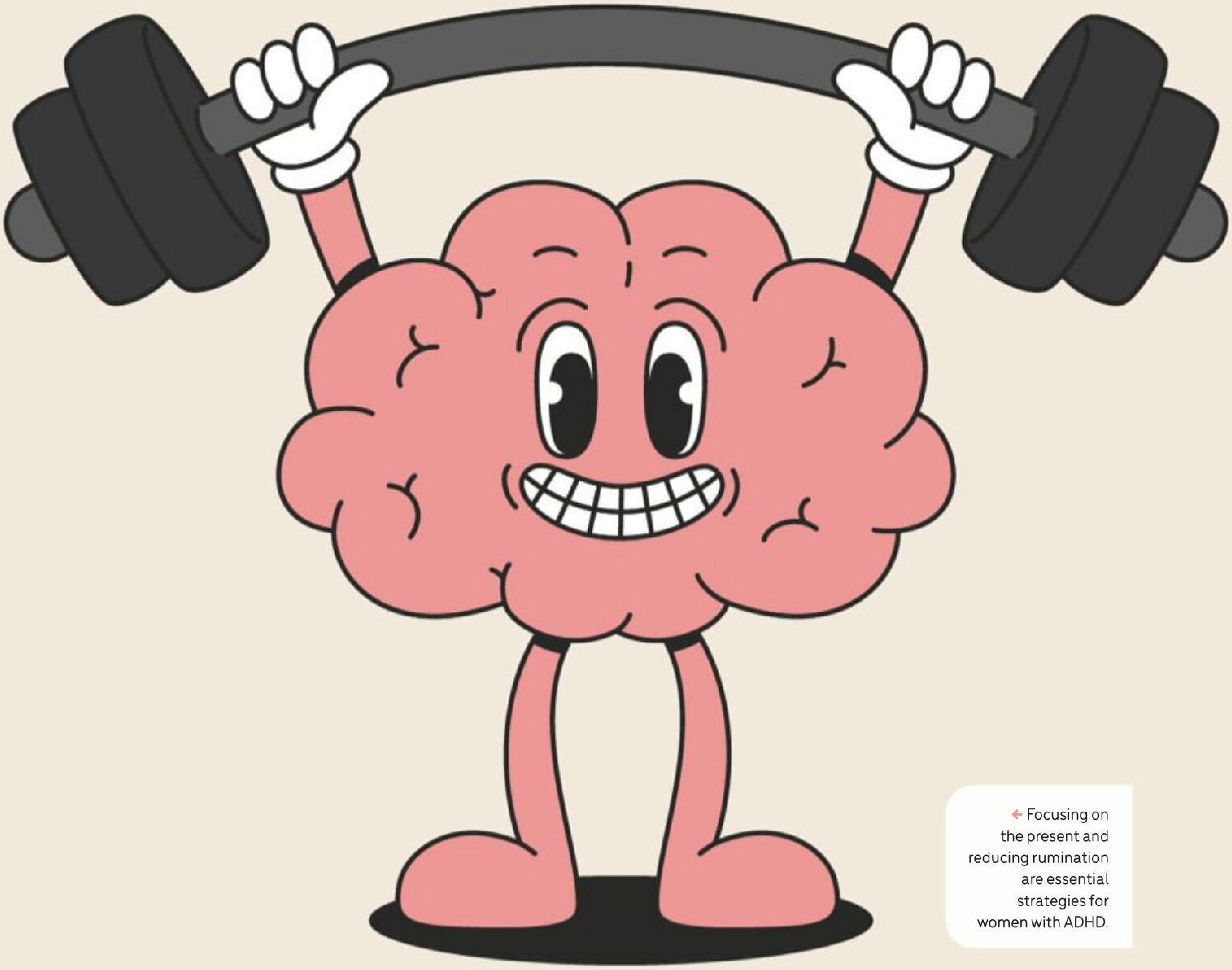
More research needs to be conducted on the role of hormones on ADHD symptoms at different stages in life; but it's clear that for some women, at least, oral contraceptive pills and hormone replacement therapy can help to even out the crests and troughs of estrogen, diminishing ADHD symptoms along the way.

Christy Duan, M.D., is a New York City psychiatrist and clinical assistant professor at NYU Langone Health.

COGNITIVE CALISTHENICS

ADHD is a good-news diagnosis because, once identified, specific techniques can help train your brain to manage and even leverage its complexities, similar to how you would train your muscles. Here are six effective therapies backed by substantial positive data from peer-reviewed studies.

→ ***By Tasha Eichenseher***



← Focusing on the present and reducing rumination are essential strategies for women with ADHD.

Getting an ADHD diagnosis can be a relief—there's finally an explanation for why it's been so challenging to get somewhere on time or finish a task. But it can also overwhelm you trying to find the right support or treatment for yourself or a loved one. As you start to explore your options, it can help to have a guide. That's where therapy fits in. A therapist can help you sort through any feelings you have about a diagnosis—whether it's yours, your partner's or your child's—and teach you skills for identifying and dealing with ADHD traits and symptoms. Plus, therapy can also be helpful for addressing other life challenges that are sometimes related.

In fact, more than 60% of children and 80% of adults with ADHD also experience mental health and behavioral conditions such as excessive anger, low self-esteem, difficulty managing emotions, anxiety, depression and substance abuse problems. ADHD therapy can not only help you tackle these problems, but also enhance your ability to acknowledge and work with the positive aspects of ADHD, says Edward Hallowell, M.D. He's the co-author of *ADHD 2.0: New Science and Essential Strategies for Thriving with Distraction—From Childhood Through Adulthood* and the founder of The Hallowell ADHD Centers in New York, California and several other states.

"Your goal is to gain more control of the condition, but you don't want to slow it down," says Hallowell. There are advantages that come with this diagnosis, he explains, including creativity, originality and entrepreneurialism. Hallowell calls the process of learning about ADHD "unwrapping the gift."

The path you take to explore ADHD, and the right treatment approach—medication, coaching, therapy, or a combination of the three—will depend on your current life circumstances, the unique ways ADHD impacts you, and whether you're also experiencing symptoms of anxiety, depression and more, says Jaime Saal. She's a licensed therapist in Michigan and the chief executive officer of the Rochester Center for Behavioral Medicine.

As you explore interventions that work for you or your family, consider these six psychotherapies commonly used to help manage ADHD.

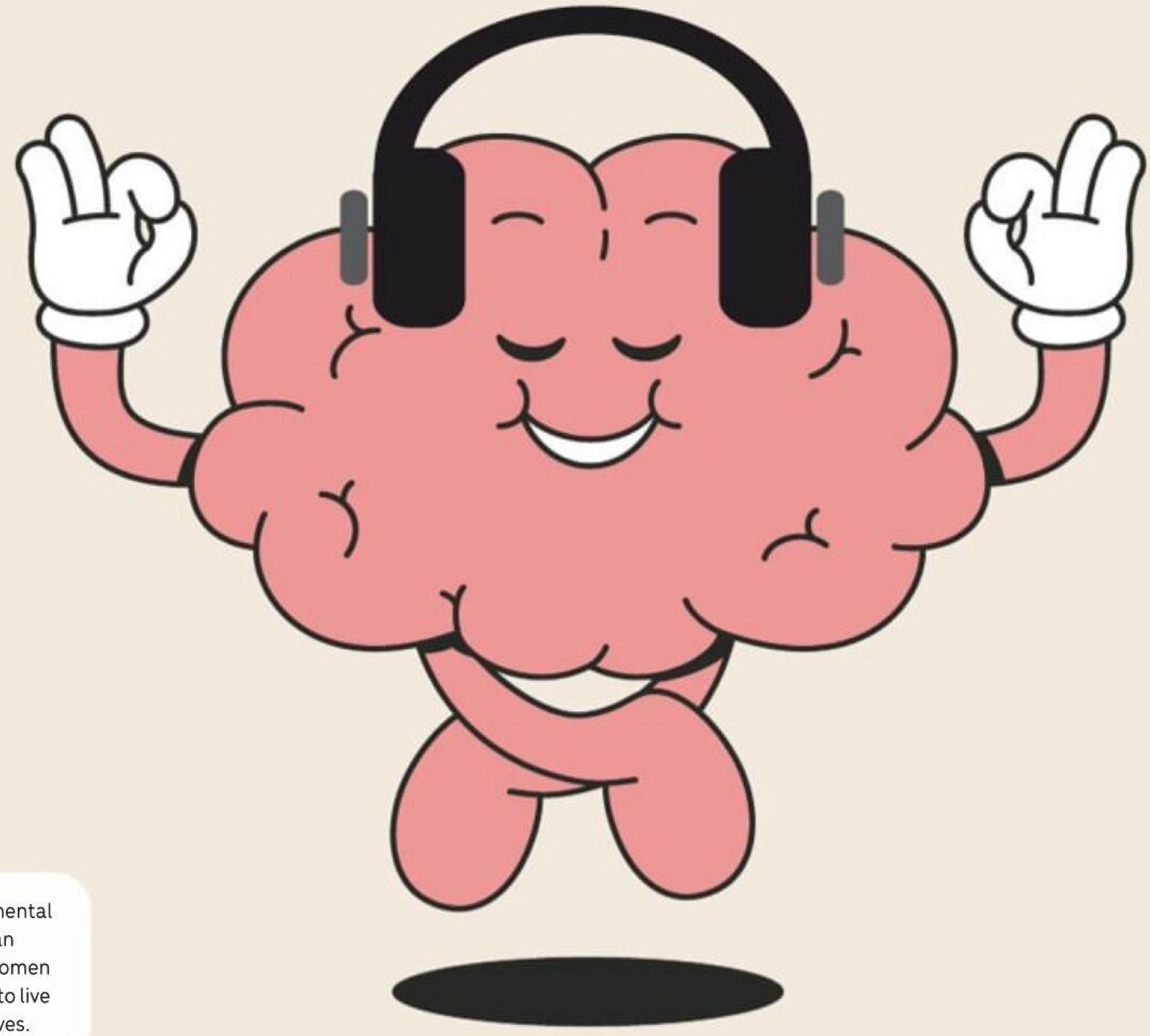
1

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is one of the most popular therapeutic treatments for ADHD. It's a form of therapy that helps you identify and change unhelpful ways of thinking and behaving. Research shows that CBT, used in conjunction with medication, can be effective at addressing procrastination, time management and confidence issues. It can also help you work through strong emotions, including those associated with anxiety and depression. A CBT therapist will help you examine your responses to difficult situations and then offer coping mechanisms to try out in session and between sessions. "Through CBT, individuals can learn to challenge and evolve the negative thought patterns and world views that hold them back," explains Saal. "For example, an adult with ADHD may employ all-or-nothing thinking or 'should' statements. Addressing these counterproductive thought patterns can help with self-esteem and low mood issues, and enhance an individual's ability to problem-solve."

2

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, or MBCT, is a version of CBT that was first developed to treat depression. It relies heavily on techniques that help you stay focused on the present moment, instead of ruminating on the past or worrying about the future. A 2021 research review of 31 studies on mindfulness practices and ADHD found that teaching present-moment awareness is just as effective as education and

> "Therapy can help you acknowledge and work with the positive aspects of ADHD. Your goal is to gain more control of the condition, but you don't want to slow it down."
>
> ~ EDWARD HALLOWELL, M.D., FOUNDER OF THE HALLOWELL ADHD CENTERS



→ Certain mental exercises can empower women with ADHD to live their best lives.

life-skills training for treating adults who have trouble focusing their attention—a primary symptom of ADHD. (See "The Quiet Mind" on page 48.)

3

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) teaches you to sit with difficult emotions and not run away from them. "ACT comes from a place of self-compassion and gaining context for your life instead of focusing on what it 'should' be," explains Lauren Ruth Martin, a licensed therapist in Tennessee. A 2021 research review of six studies on ACT for ADHD showed that it could be effective at reducing impulsivity, inattention and inflexibility—or black-and-white thinking—that can lead to procrastination, depression and anxiety.

With ACT, another sister therapy of CBT, you use mindfulness to get to know your ADHD, then you practice self-compassion, learning to accept this part of you. From there, you can decide what changes you'd like to make that align with your values.

> "It's important to have all family members come to therapy sessions. All too often, parents want to send a child alone or meet separately with a therapist, but the entire family is affected by living with ADHD."
>
> ~ SHARON SALINE, PSY.D., LICENSED PSYCHOLOGIST SPECIALIZING IN ADHD

4

Music Therapy calls on the powerful emotions and connections that music can evoke in us. In this form of therapy, you might listen to and talk about songs that have special meaning for you or you can create your own music. Listening to and developing music in therapy can help you uncover unconscious thoughts, beliefs, memories and feelings. While there are just a few studies on music therapy and ADHD, early research shows that it may help ease inattentiveness and help both children and adults to focus.

5

Nature-Based Therapy incorporates the natural world into your sessions—either physically, when therapy happens outdoors, or metaphorically, asking you to find inspiration from and meaning and comfort in natural processes like the changing seasons.

Initial studies on green therapy, also known as ecotherapy, and ADHD suggest that spending just 20 minutes outside can help reduce ADHD symptoms. And the greener the space, the better. In a 2011 study of children with ADHD, researchers found that children exposed to wilder green spaces, like parks, were more attentive afterward than children who played on hardscape outdoor playgrounds or indoors.

6

Structural Family Therapy (SFT) is an option when an ADHD diagnosis impacts every family member. Parents of kids with ADHD need to both help their kids manage symptoms and develop coping strategies for their own stress.

"SFT supports families in restructuring relationship dynamics, shifting perspectives about ADHD's influence and empowering parents to be advocates for their children," says Mercedes Samudio, Ph.D., a licensed clinical social worker in California who specializes in helping ADHD families. She adds that successful treatment starts with acknowledging that ADHD is part of your child's experience but not who they are.

Parents of children with ADHD need help understanding what it is and is not, adds Sharon Saline, Psy.D., a licensed psychologist in Massachusetts and author of *What Your ADHD Child Wishes You Knew: Working Together to Empower Kids for Success in School and Life*. "And they might need a place to discuss their relief, confusion or grief away from their child. It's important to have all family members come to the sessions. All too often, parents want to send the child alone or meet separately with the therapist, but the entire family is affected by living with ADHD." *

Tasha Eichenseher is a trauma-based therapist in Colorado.

Find the Therapy Fit That's Right for You

"CBT is the gold standard for treating ADHD, however, one size does not fit all," says Terry Matlen, a licensed clinical social worker in Michigan and New York and the founder of addconsults.com. She specializes in helping women with an ADHD diagnosis find the help they need and want.

Jaime Saal adds: "In our experience, the best outcomes are achieved by therapists who are nondogmatic in their approach. They start with a foundation of evidence-based therapies but remain responsive to what is working particularly well for the patient—and what is not—and they maintain an open dialogue with the patient throughout the entirety of the therapeutic process."

Stephanie Moulton Sarkis, Ph.D., a licensed therapist in Florida and the author of *Adult ADD: A Guide for the Newly Diagnosed*, encourages people who are beginning their ADHD treatment journey to try out different therapists and therapies until something definitively clicks.

She reminds folks to check what their insurance will and will not cover, and she advises against signing any contracts that obligate you to a specific number of sessions. "Also, beware of anyone who says things such as 'Don't you want what's best for your child?' or uses guilting or shaming to drive people to sign up for treatment," she adds.

At the end of the day, what matters most is that you find a therapist who is smart, compassionate and willing to learn, says Edward Hallowell.

"And remember, this is a good news diagnosis," he adds. "Things can only get better."

Can You Go Without?

WHAT ARE THE COSTS AND GAINS FOR WOMEN WHO DECIDE TO BACK OFF THEIR ADHD MEDS?

→ ***By Caren Chesler***

↗ An environment with plenty of open space and the chance to move fast could be fabulous personal therapy and the perfect vacation for a woman with ADHD.

When women with ADHD feel side effects from their stimulant or other psychoactive drugs, they may decide to go off of them, at least for brief periods of time. But going cold turkey can make life go awry, with problems ranging from disorganization at work to graver outcomes such as relationship violence or suicidal thoughts.

Yet, while it's not easy, some women have managed to live successful, productive lives psychopharmaceutical-free. From eliminating side effects to harnessing the creativity of their fast-paced ADHD brains, they have shed the shackles of Big Pharma's meds.

Of course, riding ADHD without the saddle of medication takes a strategic approach. These techniques might help:

* **Treatment with estrogen.** Since estrogen can increase dopamine levels, and a lack of dopamine can trigger ADHD symptoms, one potential treatment is to take estrogen, particularly when levels drop, such as just before the menstrual cycle begins.

In a study that's about to emerge from the University of Kentucky, researchers had about 100 undergraduate girls track their menstrual cycles and their ADHD symptoms and found that those symptoms worsen right before and during a period. The findings support the idea of increasing estrogen to mitigate those symptoms, covered elsewhere in this book.

* **Practice mindfulness.** An analysis of multiple studies done in 2016, 2020 and 2023 found that mindfulness practices like meditation, yoga and qigong can reduce ADHD symptoms such as poor executive functioning, inattention, and hyperactivity or impulsivity.

* **Exercise** can also reduce symptoms. A study in 2022, for instance, found that physical exercise can effectively improve attention, motor skills, and executive functioning in children with ADHD,

> **Seek work that capitalizes on your strengths and does not penalize your weaknesses. Don't put yourself in an environment where the things you struggle with are the criteria for success.**

without any adverse side effects, as compared to drug therapy.

- **Create a life with fewer distractions** can make coping easier. Taking certain notifications off your phone at specific times of day or taking a break from technology altogether, perhaps on weekends, can be helpful, as are time-tested coping strategies to help with organization and time management.

- **Know thyself.** Symptoms fluctuate. If you know you're headed for a stretch of time that may expose you to some of your risk factors, talk to a doctor or use management strategies that have worked in the past. For people with ADHD-like traits, the key to staying in that good zone is really knowing what you need and actively seeking that out.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT JOB

Beyond these basic strategies, carefully selecting a profession and work environment is key. If you are a person who has trouble sitting still, a job that requires you to sit all day probably wouldn't work well for you. You might be more successful in a job that enables you to move around and do different things. Take stock of your strengths and weaknesses and ask yourself if there's a job that capitalizes on your strengths—and does not penalize you for your weaknesses. Basically, don't put yourself in an environment where the things that you struggle with are the criteria for success.

The experts say there are many different types of work that might make sense for an ADHD brain. For those who like novelty and often rely on a friendly, outgoing personality, jobs such as a high school teacher, police officer or community journalist might make the best use of your abilities. For those who like to use their hands, professions such as nursing, carpentry, welding, dentistry, hairstyling or the culinary arts might work.

Someone with an adventurous streak might opt to be an archaeologist, airplane pilot, tour guide, or an FBI or CIA agent. And for those who are hyperfocused, a career as a coder or IT engineer would play to that strength.

Women forgoing ADHD meds might especially want to be involved in work that is versatile, creative and flexible, giving them the stimulation and variation they need. Careers geared specifically toward the creative arts or entrepreneurship, as well as those that involve problem-solving with multitasking skills, could be ideal, said Sham Singh, a psychiatrist at the WINIT Clinic in Santa Monica, California, who takes a holistic approach to mental health.

"In addition, it will make all the difference in the world for them to have a work environment that is nonjudgmental and understanding," Singh said.

MANAGING YOUR OWN SYMPTOMS

Women who don't want to drop their meds altogether but would like to reduce use need to pay careful attention to the fluctuations in their symptoms, because they may be able to use stimulants on an as-needed basis, for example when their menstrual cycle is approaching or when extra stressors are coming up in their lives.

But others may be able to manage their symptoms without the meds. "Using lifestyle changes (such as increased exercise and sleep regulation) to manage ADHD is gaining steam," said Kathleen Nadeau, director of the Chesapeake Center, which offers services to those with ADHD. "As you can imagine, there will be pushback from prescribers and pharmaceutical companies, since they have been the main show for decades."

Nadeau said she was even feeling pushback at her own clinic, but she recently hired two psychiatrists trained in "integrative psychiatry," and they are slowly—she emphasized the word "slowly"—making inroads with the clinic's more traditional psychiatrists by showing that lifestyle changes can certainly help.

↘ Women with ADHD can thrive in jobs that tap their creativity, while leaving mundane tasks to others. When a job plays to their strengths and avoids their weaknesses, it becomes easier to perform well without meds.

WHEN IT COMES TO STOPPING, A CAUTIONARY STANCE

Not everyone thinks forgoing meds is a good idea, even with lifestyle modifications. J.J. Sandra Kooij, a psychiatrist specializing in adult ADHD and the impact of hormonal fluctuations across the life span at Amsterdam University Medical Center in the Netherlands, said women can certainly stop their ADHD meds or just use them as needed, but the outcome will not be the same as using medication that is well-dosed and timed for the individual's needs.

"It's true that if you have the right support, you sleep well, your mood is good, and your job is exactly what you need, you may experience fewer difficulties. The problem is that these kinds of circumstances are not stable; life comes along with losses, illness, and changing homes, jobs and partners, which make ADHD a big problem," said Kooij, who developed a diagnostic interview called DIVA-5 for adults with ADHD. "So, if you want stability, you'd better acknowledge your issues, treat them well, and take care of your sleep, mood, hormones and health."

The decision to remove medication from girls, especially, should be made only with care because, taken during childhood, stimulant medication literally increases the size of the brain regions associated with ADHD. Over the past decade, studies based on magnetic resonance imaging of the brain have revealed that adults with ADHD had larger basal ganglia regions like the right globus pallidus, the right putamen, and the caudate nucleus, if they took stimulants as children. On the other hand, those areas of the brain remained smaller and underdeveloped in adulthood in those who went untreated as kids.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

But for grown women, managing ADHD symptoms without psychopharmaceuticals comes without that risk; development of their prefrontal cortex and other parts of the brain is already complete. For them, individual circumstances, like their support system, the severity of their symptoms, their career, life stressors, and access to alternative strategies all come into play, said Amy Braun, a clinical counselor in Chicago who treats women with ADHD. "A structured routine, plenty of sleep, flexibility, creative outlets, therapy and exercise can do wonders for a woman with ADHD." Tools that support neurodiversity, such as visual reminders, alarms, planners, and ADHD-friendly apps can help, especially when severity of symptoms otherwise stay at bay.

Braun had one patient, Rachel (not her real name), who wanted to go off her medication after she struggled with side effects and then became pregnant. To make it work, she restructured her life to align with her strengths, leaving a nine-to-five job and pursuing a career as a freelance graphic designer. The change allowed her to work when she had bursts of creativity and felt the most focused and to not work when her symptoms flared. Her husband took on a larger share of the household tasks to accommodate the change. She also began practicing mindfulness daily, using apps like Calm to help with emotion regulation and focus, doing yoga several times a week, and seeing a therapist (Braun) with expertise in treating women with ADHD.

Rachel is now thriving, Braun said. "She feels in control and lives a life where she feels balanced. Not all days are easy, but she has structured her life in a way that her ADHD symptoms do not impact her daily functioning." *

> "A structured routine, plenty of sleep, flexibility, creative outlets, therapy and exercise can do wonders for women with ADHD."
>
> ~ AMY BRAUN, CLINICAL COUNSELOR, CHICAGO

→ Women with ADHD make excellent teachers, especially when they can move around and mix up the tasks. A word of caution here: Even when they excel in the classroom, they may still struggle mightily when they have to grade papers and tests.

PART 3

Lifestyle Strategies

LIVING WELL MEANS MASTERING HABITS THAT NURTURE YOUR BRAIN. HERE'S HOW TO SLEEP, EXERCISE, MAKE FRIENDS, AND FIND YOUR BEST SELF.

The Qui

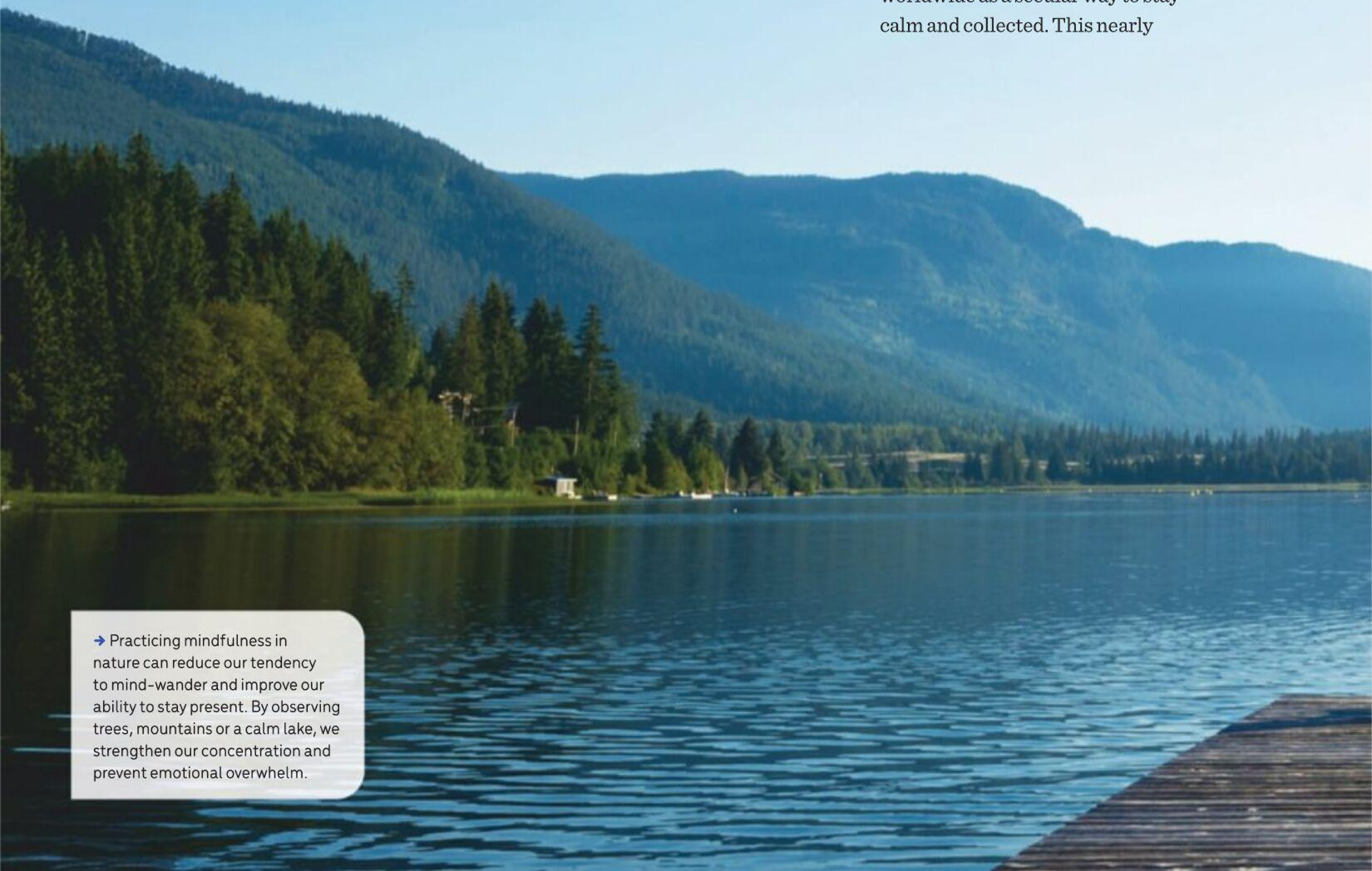
AFTER A LITTLE TRAINING, YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH MINDFULNESS ALL

If you're struggling to focus, sit still or self-motivate, mindfulness may be the last thing you want to try. After all, it can require significant concentration and discipline. But don't let that stop you from experimenting with this ancient and now popular practice, especially if you've been diagnosed with ADHD. Nearly two decades of research show that mindfulness can help ease the symptoms of ADHD, including inattentiveness, hyperactivity, restlessness and impulsivity. In my own therapy practice, clients who have battled the symptoms of ADHD for years find they can concentrate, control impulses, and regulate emotions better after just a couple months of short mindfulness exercises. Plus, the self-compassion typically built into mindfulness exercises can help untangle people from the guilt and shame often associated with ADHD.

Having an ADHD diagnosis myself, I credit mindfulness practices with giving me a new perspective on and significant relief from the constant pull of urgent thoughts and random ideas bouncing around my mind. The good news is that you can start small. You don't have to sit meditating for hours to reap the benefits of these tried-and-true practices.

IN THE MOMENT

Mindfulness has its roots in Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, but is now practiced worldwide as a secular way to stay calm and collected. This nearly



→ Practicing mindfulness in nature can reduce our tendency to mind-wander and improve our ability to stay present. By observing trees, mountains or a calm lake, we strengthen our concentration and prevent emotional overwhelm.

et Mind

BY YOURSELF. HERE'S HOW.

→ By Tasha Eichenseher

5,000-year-old tradition has two pillars: practicing present-moment awareness and doing it without judgment. That means you try to observe the thoughts, emotions, sensations and impulses that float or ricochet through your head—*I'm angry. I want ice cream. The air is cold. What's that sound?*—without labeling them as "good" or "bad." You're simply being, and noticing what that's like. You can do this in a formal way through meditation, where you sit still in a quiet space, or informally, where you notice sensations and feelings while you wash the dishes or wait in line at the grocery store.

One of the first researchers to study the impacts of mindfulness practices on people diagnosed with ADHD was Lidia Zylowska, M.D., an associate professor at the University of Minnesota Medical School and author of *The Mindfulness Prescription for Adult ADHD*. Her original study, published in 2007 in the *Journal of Attention Disorders,* looked at the effects of an eight-week mindfulness program on adolescents and adults with ADHD. The study participants practiced a combination of meditating, body and breath awareness, mindful listening and speaking, and self-compassion on a daily basis. The self-compassion element of Zylowska's protocol included a regular two-minute appreciation meditation at the end of most weekly sessions; study subjects were asked to reflect on the gratitude they felt for themselves and other participants, then prompted to "… bring a sense of appreciation to yourself, for being here and taking the time for learning about yourself and mindfulness." Afterward, they reported improved attentiveness, as well as fewer symptoms of the anxiety and depression commonly experienced with ADHD.

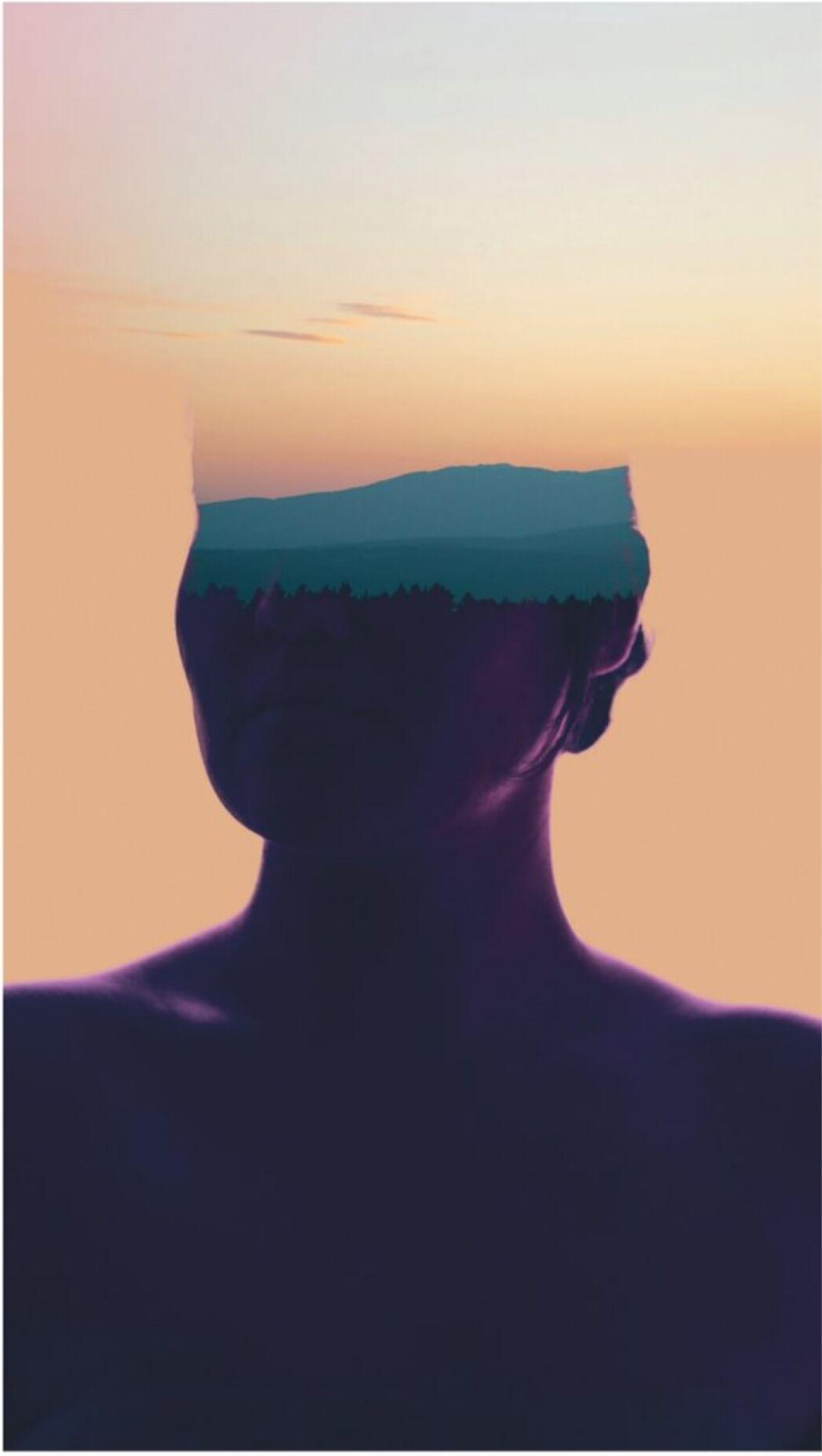
Since then, dozens of other findings have supported the use of mindfulness for ADHD. A 2021 research review of 31 studies, published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders,* concluded that mindfulness is equally as effective

> "Mindfulness practices can physically change the brain, creating more neural activity associated with attention, decision-making, organizing, planning and memory—a counterbalance to ADHD's deficits."
>
> ~ TASHA EICHENSEHER, THERAPIST

as education and life-skills training for treating adults who have trouble focusing their attention. In a study of alternative ADHD treatments published in 2024 in the journal *Mindfulness*, researchers compared the effects of medication to family mindfulness practices in children diagnosed with ADHD. They found that medication was more effective in the short term, but mindfulness could be considered for a longer-term alternative or in addition to drugs.

SELF-REGULATION TRAINING

Mindfulness can help alleviate ADHD symptoms by shifting focus from a busy mind to an awareness of your senses and reactions, according to Zylowska and her co-author, John T. Mitchell, Ph.D., an associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Duke University School of Medicine. They discuss this in their 2020 book *Mindfulness for Adult ADHD*.



In essence, they explain, “ADHD is a self-regulation disorder; mindfulness is self-regulation training.”

Over the past several years, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) of ADHD brains has revealed that they have less neural activity associated with cognitive control than a typical brain. ADHD brains also have a more active default mode network (DMN), a center for daydreaming that leads the mind to wander. (See “Going With the Flow” on page 82.) But neuroimaging has also shown that mindfulness practices can physically change the brain, creating more neural activity associated with attention, decision-making, organizing, planning and memory—a counterbalance to ADHD’s deficits.

MONKEY MIND

Because sitting still and training your attention on one thing for long periods of time can be difficult when you have ADHD, there are protocols that ease people into mindfulness, a few minutes at a time.

With Zylowska’s method, you start with informal 3- to 5-minute sessions that focus on sensory awareness, like how something tastes or smells, working your way up to 15 minutes of seated meditation.

Casey Dixon, a certified ADHD coach and founder of MindfullyADD, offers one-, two- and three-minute breathing, body awareness, and sound meditation practices for finding focus. In sound meditation, you focus your awareness on calming music (usually without recognizable words) or the sounds of rain, chimes or even the room you’re in.

It’s not uncommon to feel extreme discomfort when you start to practice mindfulness. As you work to bring your attention to your senses, body and breath, you may become painfully aware of just how often your thoughts and focus shift. This is called “monkey mind” in Buddhist meditation. It’s a normal human experience, but one that gets amplified by ADHD. Remind yourself that you can get through the initial difficulty, and that no one is perfect at practicing mindfulness. Instead of saying to yourself “That’s stupid” or “Why can’t I do this?”, try saying “Isn’t that interesting?” Then bring your awareness back to the breath, physical sensations or nearby sounds. *

Start Here

THESE THREE SIMPLE EXERCISES CAN HELP YOU MASTER THE BASICS OF MINDFULNESS.

1/ **Master breathing first.** Beginners can start with a practice called S.T.O.P., available on Lidia Zylowska’s YouTube channel under the handle @MindfulRxADHD. S.T.O.P. stands for “stop,” “take in a fresh breath of air,” “observe your thoughts” and “proceed.” This exercise can take just a minute and fits into everyday life.

2/ **Next, work to achieve sensory awareness so that you stay in the present moment.** The next time you catch your mind racing or your attention fractured, use Zylowska’s mindful eating exercise: Take something small, like a raisin, and examine it with all of your senses, exploring how it looks, smells and feels in your mouth, before you take a bite. Once you start chewing, close your eyes and notice any sounds you hear and how the texture and taste may have changed.

3/ **Finally, learn to pivot.** Casey Dixon offers a short breathing exercise that I find effective when I want to switch gears and start focusing on a new task. It’s called elevator practice. You start in a comfortable seated or standing position, with a hand near your belly button. As you inhale through your nose, follow your breath with your hand, all the way to your head. On the exhalations, follow the breath back down to your belly button. Try this for one minute, building to longer sessions over time.

THE YOGA RX

Movement plus mindfulness can create magical conditions for finding focus and taming impulsivity. Here's why yoga could be the workout you're looking for.

→ ***By Tasha Eichenseher***

Yoga might sound like torture if you struggle to sit still or can't fathom being holed up in a room for 60 minutes while someone demands your focus. But yoga in the Western world can look like a lot of different things—and many of those modern yoga styles and classes can help you soothe the stressful symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Whether you're in a fast-paced, physically demanding class or a restorative session designed specifically to calm your nerves, yoga is, at its core, mindful movement paired with breath.

And the one thing most every ADHD expert can agree on is that movement is a science-backed salve for managing ADHD. Research shows that just 15 minutes of biking, walking, or attending a yoga class can provide a dopamine boost that enhances motivation and executive functioning. This includes skills such as prioritizing, planning, self-control, and managing multiple tasks—key areas often affected by ADHD.

Research also shows that people with ADHD, and mental health conditions that often accompany ADHD, such as depression, have lower levels of dopamine. Without adequate dopamine, it's more difficult to take action and stay focused. ADHD medications such as Ritalin and Adderall are effective at treating ADHD in large part because they increase the production of this essential feel-good chemical. Then add a dash of mindfulness to your movement practice—required in yoga as you track your breath and try to stay present in your body—and you're getting an extra boost.

Mindfulness practices, the precursor to formal meditation, train your brain to intentionally switch your attention from one thing to the next—a challenge for most people with ADHD. Neuroimaging has shown that mindfulness can physically change the brain, creating even more neural activity associated with attention, decision-making, organizing, planning and memory. (See "The Quiet Mind" on page 52.)

"For ADHD brains that are always 'on,' yoga serves as a moving meditation, offering moments of peace and presence that are hard to access in daily life," says Rosie Turner, the founder of ADHD Untangled, a coaching and training business that uses movement as a primary means of managing symptoms of ADHD.

The mental focus of yoga, combined with its emphasis on concentration, creates an ideal practice for women with ADHD who want to strengthen both their bodies and minds. For those feeling especially motivated, enhancing a yoga routine with additional physical challenges can help achieve optimal mind-body fitness.

> “Movement has saved my life and brought me to a deeper awareness of my differences. When combined with other strategies, it’s an incredible treatment.”
>
> ~ ROSIE TURNER, FOUNDER, ADHD UNTANGLED

Turner creates programs and protocols for training yoga teachers and other movement instructors to work more effectively with students who have an ADHD diagnosis. Turner adds: “Movement has truly saved my life and brought me to a deeper awareness of my differences. It’s an incredible treatment for ADHD when combined with other strategies and treatments.”

While the research on how yoga affects the ADHD brain is in its infancy, early studies show promise. For example, a 2021 research review published in the journal *Cureus* found that practicing yoga postures reduced hyperactivity and distractibility in children with ADHD.

THE X FACTOR

Yoga can be particularly powerful for helping women with ADHD, especially during times of hormonal change, adds Turner, who is also the host of the ADHD Untangled podcast.

Science shows that hormonal changes affect women with ADHD more significantly than women without ADHD. (See “Menopause

→ Many women with ADHD are drawn to dynamic and physically engaging styles of yoga that emphasize the connection between breath and movement. However, yoga can also be practiced in a gentler, more relaxed way to suit different preferences and needs.

Madness" on page 26.) For women with already low dopamine levels, periods of estrogen drops, like those seen the week before menstruation or during perimenopause, can worsen ADHD symptoms, explains Turner. "In my clinic, I've yet to meet a woman with ADHD who doesn't face challenges related to this."

In a 2022 study of 60 perimenopausal women, researchers determined that levels of estrogen and progesterone increased after four weeks of yoga (six days a week for 40 minutes each day), increasing balance and reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases often associated with menopause.

WHERE TO START

Given the diversity of yoga styles available in most geographic areas and online, it can be hard to know where to go for a good class.

Plus, what works for one person with ADHD, may not for another. For example, says Turner: "I know many ADHD women, like me, who are drawn to rocket yoga—a dynamic practice that acts almost like stimulant medication, speeding you up to slow you down. On the other hand, I've met many ADHD women who prefer yin yoga, which offers a slower, more grounding experience." *

HERE ARE TIPS FOR HOW TO TRY ON A YOGA PRACTICE:

1/ GET CLEAR ON YOUR WHY

Focus on *why* you are starting yoga, Rosie Turner says. "Who do you become through the practice? What do you gain? And why is this important to you?"

2/ EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT CLASSES

A lot of people have a bad experience at their first yoga class and never go back. But if you can find a teacher you like, your chances of sticking with it are better, explains Turner. "In fact, the teacher is often what we connect with most," she explains. "If one class doesn't work for you, don't give up—keep exploring until you find the teacher and style that click."

In her trainings, Turner focuses on these aspects of a class—something to look for as you shop around for your perfect yoga pairing:

Classes that incorporate a challenge: It's common for people with ADHD to quickly get bored. Classes tailored for ADHDers keep things engaging with dynamic movement or peak poses that you work up to.

Teachers that use empowering language: Teachers trained to work with people who identify with ADHD avoid words that might trigger rejection sensitivity—a common symptom.

Classes that offer freedom and agency: Look for classes and teachers who offer students the choice to do more or less.

Shorter sessions: ADHD-specific classes will cater to shorter attention spans.

3/ LET GO OF PERFECTIONISM

"Yoga isn't about being good or bad at it—it's called a practice for a reason," Turner says. "What yoga gives me far outweighs the fear of failure or judgment."

If you aren't ready for a class and want to simply experiment at home with a posture or two, try something foundational, like a mountain pose. Stand tall with your feet firmly connected to the earth or floor and your hands by your sides, palms turned out. Stay here for one minute, scanning your body for any tension spots or places that feel good or neutral. Notice your breath and how your body moves with your inhalations and exhalations. This trains your attention on sensations. Over time you can practice more challenging postures while holding your attention on what's happening internally, instead of distracting yourself from any physical discomfort by thinking about other things.

Keep at it, and soon you'll be able to flex your focus more easily, on and off your yoga mat.

NIGHT OWLS

Understanding the connection between ADHD and late-night wakefulness—and how to manage it

→ **By Tara Haelle**

When Amanda Eller, a 37-year-old math tutor in Detroit, was diagnosed with ADHD four years ago, she received a second diagnosis at the same time: delayed sleep phase syndrome (DSPS), a circadian rhythm disorder in which a person's internal body clock is shifted at least two hours later than the typical sleep-wake cycle. As she dove down a rabbit hole to learn everything about DSPS, much of her life made more sense, like why it felt normal to be up until 4 or 5 a.m. in the morning.

"I grew up feeling that my parents thought I was stubborn," she says. "It was nice to learn I had not been a lazy sack my whole life as portrayed by everybody."

By her 30s, she had heard it all: people telling her she could retrain her sleep schedule if she really wanted to, people telling her to put her screens and devices away earlier, people simply not believing her. "I could do all of that and go to bed at 10 o'clock, and I'm still going to lie there for six hours," she says. "I've done it. It's not fun. The biggest misconception is that I can just fix my sleep schedule; I can stay up for 24 hours—and still not fall asleep until 4 a.m. that morning."

That's because DSPS is literally encoded into the genes of people who have it, just as strongly as a "normal" internal body clock for typical folks. The average bedtime for most people is around 11:30 p.m., but those with DSPS can't fall asleep that early. Their bedtime is at least two hours—often four to six hours—later. And researchers estimate that somewhere between one in seven to one in two people with ADHD have DSPS or a late chronotype, making them chronic night owls. Estimates are higher for those with ADHD plus anxiety or depression.

Earnest Aaron, a 34-year-old American living in England, spent 14 years of his life trying to "cure" his DSPS, but tools suggested by therapists didn't work, and sometimes made things worse. With a sleep doctor's help, he tried meditation, taking walks after waking, early morning bright light therapy, strict bedtime and wake times … every trick in the book until his doctor finally gave him a letter for work saying he needed an accommodation—to start at 11 a.m.

"It was biological, not me being lazy," he says. Today, Aaron is CEO of Snooze Science, a company he founded to develop an app to help others like him. "Sleep medicine is still primarily focused on trying to shift a DSPS person to a 'normal schedule'," he says. His app helps people track and manage their natural sleep hygiene so they can hopefully build their lives around that, or at least be aware of it.

Around 50% to 80% of people with ADHD have sleep problems, a 2023 study found. These include obstructive sleep apnea, restless legs syndrome, narcolepsy, and insomnia, but DSPS is by far the most common problem. People with

> “The biggest misconception is that I can just fix my sleep schedule; I can stay up for 24 hours—and still not fall asleep until 4 a.m. that morning.”
>
> ~ AMANDA ELLER, MATH TUTOR, DETROIT

↗ The tendency to stay up late may be another aspect of neurodiversity, one that often accompanies ADHD. This trait, known as a late or evening chronotype, cannot be altered through standard insomnia treatments and instead calls for radical acceptance.

ADHD are more than twice as likely as neurotypicals to have DSPS or an extremely late chronotype.

Scientists are still learning how ADHD and DSPS are linked. Both conditions share genetic risk factors and could have a common underlying cause. The biggest clue is the body's timing for producing melatonin, a hormone triggered by darkness that tells your body it's time to sleep. Researchers have found that around three in four people with ADHD produce melatonin an average 1.5 hours later than typical people do. That's why they don't feel tired or ready for bed until much later in the evening. And that's an average, so many have their sleep delayed to even later hours.

The problem is that not getting enough sleep can worsen symptoms, says ADHD coach Linda Roggli. Sleep deprivation causes forgetfulness and concentration problems and increases risk of depression and anxiety—both already more common with ADHD. And people with ADHD are nearly three times likelier than others to get less than six hours of sleep nightly, often because their chronotype doesn't match society's. What's more, symptoms such as impulsivity, hyperactivity and hyperfocusing reinforce staying up late.

Though called a "disorder," many experts point out that it's simply people whose chronotype doesn't align with society's waking hours. Aaron compares it to society's past treatment of left-handed people, who were punished for not using their right hands. Eventually, society caught up to the science and determined it was better for everyone to accept and accommodate southpaws. There's nothing wrong with someone who's a biologically natural extreme night owl. But society hasn't caught up with accommodating their biology yet.

↗ Simple strategies, like wearing a mask to block out light, often aren't effective for people with ADHD. Their natural internal clock tends to keep them awake much later than average. As a result, finding a career that accommodates a later sleep schedule can be essential.

DEALING WITH IT

Eller was initially happy to learn what caused her sleep schedule, but now she's grown frustrated with a world that only caters to daytime people. "I would love to take the world like a snow globe and just shake it up and fix everything."

The challenges she faces as a third-shifter are familiar to other ADHD night owls: shopping when stores close so early, finding decent places to eat late at night, getting to doctor appointments on time, and running errands at places with typical business hours. Even friendships are affected. She loves hiking and rock climbing but has drifted away from friends who do morning hikes.

She advises others with a late-night chronotype to "ignore all the judgmental responses you get from people." Then, take time to grieve. "There will be a grieving process where you look back on your life and realize how many times you were mocked, chastised, punished, and neglected for stuff that was normal the whole time because you didn't have your diagnosis," she says.

Today, she's built her life around her chronotype because "absolutely any

nine-to-five job is out of the question." It's why she's a math tutor instead of a substitute teacher. Her children, who also have DSPS, do remote online schooling. She schedules doctors' appointments further out to get afternoon availability.

Those with DSPS usually have to find a career path that syncs with their sleep schedule. If it's impossible to adjust their work and lifestyle to their chronotype, they must accept that sleeping "normal" hours will always feel like fitting a square peg into a round hole. (However, the tips to the right may help mitigate the severity.) *

Sleep Hygiene

IF YOU HAVE A NEURODIVERGENT CHRONOTYPE, THESE RECOMMENDATIONS CAN HELP.

- Limit exposure to screens before bedtime because the light delays melatonin release even more. Start with no screens 15 minutes before bed, and then extend that out to an hour over time.

- Taking melatonin 1–2 hours before bed can help you fall asleep, though it doesn't help with staying asleep. Also, melatonin is most effective at lower doses, such as 0.3 to 1 mg.

- Avoid stimulating activities, especially those that encourage hyperfocusing, in the evening.

- Find routines that help you wind down before bed, whether it's a favorite light snack, taking a hot bath, reading, meditating, or another calming activity.

- Make your room as dark and as quiet as possible. Consider using white noise to block out any kind of background sound that could keep you awake, even if it's just a dripping faucet.

- Keep the bedroom cooler so that you can curl up under the covers. Try a weighted blanket.

- Avoid caffeine during the second half of the day, and avoid or reduce alcohol intake, especially before bed. Even if alcohol knocks you out, it disturbs your sleep patterns.

- Get sleepy with a boring audiobook or podcast.

- Get exposure to sunlight as early in the day as possible.

- Go to bed and wake up as close to the same time each day as possible.

- Get regular exercise. For some, exercising right before sleeping is too stimulating, but for others, it helps them calm down. Learn what works for you.

Girls and women with ADHD can overcome social challenges and build meaningful, lasting friendships. While they may not have a large group of supporters, with some assistance, they can find the close-knit friends they need.

You Only Need One

IT'S HARDER TO MAKE AND KEEP THOSE FRIENDS, BUT FEMALES WITH ADHD ARE USUALLY SOCIAL ENOUGH TO FIND THEIR PEOPLE AND KEEP THEM NEAR.

→ ***By Gilly Kahn, Ph.D.***

One of the many relationships in which girls and women with ADHD struggle is friendship. And when I say we struggle in "friendship," I mean every aspect of it. First, there's meeting people (ugh). Then, there's deciding which person might be worthy of our time and finding people who fit our mold in a world where most people, well—don't. Friendship research has strongly established that lasting friendships tend to involve two individuals who are similar to each other. This makes sense given that "birds of a feather flock together"—and neurodivergent folks are certainly no exception.

THE COMPANIONS OF OUR YOUTH

In childhood, most of our friendships are constrained by physical proximity. Children often befriend other children largely by default, because they live in the same neighborhood or are involved in the same extracurricular activities. But as we grow, we develop more freedom to choose our friends widely. We are drawn to similar others and are also influenced by our friends—we grow increasingly similar to each other the longer we stay in that relationship.

Yet a wider reach with greater freedom to choose friends is extremely beneficial to those with ADHD, research shows. For example, a 2020 study found that while teens struggled to make and keep friends in elementary and middle school, once they reached high school and were exposed to a different, larger group of teens, they were better able to select others who were similar to them. Because of this, they ended up developing better and more stable friendships.

The dilemma with actually befriending others with ADHD is we are a significant minority (about 4% of adults and 11% of children in the U.S.). And, our executive functioning and related social skills can cause frequent unwelcome dents in our social plans. So, is it any wonder that making and keeping friends can feel like climbing Mount Everest?

CROSSING THE GENDER GAP

Sex differences introduce even more complexity into our friendships. The extent and types of challenges within friendships inevitably differ between males and females. This is a given, considering that the female brain is a social brain. As girls and women, our brains function largely to connect with others. Girls and boys are also treated and viewed differently, and this can influence their relationships.

The way friends interact with each other differs between the sexes. Earlier in development, boys play in groups and engage in more rough play than girls, who gravitate more toward pretend and caretaking play. As kids get older, girls' friendships are characterized by self-disclosure and intimacy, whereas boys' friendships, though equally supportive, are more about being around each other.

IT'S COMPLICATED

Can girls and women with ADHD forge friendships as easily as those without this neurodiversity? The research is sparse, yet clear. As ADHD girls and women, we *can* make and also keep friends. But getting there is harder for us than it is for females without ADHD. In a group of 13 studies, girls with ADHD displayed more difficulty forming and keeping friendships. They tended to be thwarted by bullying and behavior problems more than girls without

ADHD. Girls with ADHD were also more likely to be rejected by peers, though studies show this seems to be dependent on the presence of conduct issues, including a kind of social aggression that involves spreading rumors or using hurtful language against their friends.

Expectedly, the challenges formed a vicious cycle resulting in still more rejection and behavior problems over time. In a study of girls spending five weeks at summer camp, researchers found that those *with* ADHD usually had fewer friends or no friends at all.

These friendships, when they form, are often complicated. One subject within the area of girls' friendships in which I've had a special interest since graduate school (and have co-published on) is *co-rumination.* Co-rumination is a verbal interaction between two people that combines self-disclosure (sharing personal information with someone else) and rumination (rehashing problems and negative emotions). Envision co-rumination as two girls leaning in and confiding in one another about a specific problem that led to hurt feelings (for instance, a recent breakup or a fight with a close friend). Only, instead of problem-solving and finishing the conversation once a potential solution is reached, the girls continue to sit in the muck of their negative feelings and revisit, rehash, and review all of the pain associated with that event.

Productive? Well ... *kind of.*

Co-rumination presents a "double-edged sword" in relationships. It's associated with increased closeness and social support, but also causes spikes in anxiety and depression, especially in girls. We lean in during these intimate conversations in an effort to connect. And we *do* connect. But we may inadvertently hurt each other in the process.

THE STRUGGLE FOR CLOSENESS

Clearly, making good friends can be excruciatingly difficult. As a woman with ADHD, I have found forming and maintaining close friendships to be really hard. And I'm sure I don't stand alone in that experience. I'm selective in my friendships, and it takes a lot of emotional and physical energy for me to really invest in a relationship.

← Individuals with ADHD, particularly those who are female, often find one another and form lasting friendships despite their challenges. They have a unique understanding of each other's quirks, and a friend with ADHD may be more forgiving of traits such as being talkative or forgetful.

Not too long ago, I learned that my best friend has been struggling with some severe medical issues. Since then, I've been looking at my raw under-eyes in the mirror, wondering how I got to this place at the age of 34. The truth is that I don't have many friends, so losing my best friend would really mean losing myself.

In these moments, I can't help but blame myself:

- → *"Why'd I put all my eggs in one basket?"*
- → *"Shouldn't I have been more social?"*
- → *"Why didn't I put myself out there?"*
- → *"Why the hell am I so picky in relationships?"*
- → *"Why am I so ... DIFFERENT?"*
- → *"Why is this so hard?"*

As ADHD women, we can easily spiral into the trap of blaming ourselves—only focusing on how stupid, stupid, stupid, we can be.

But if we really take a step back and look at the science, we aren't stupid. We're the opposite of stupid.

WHEN IT COMES TO BUDDIES, LESS CAN BE MORE

Because here's the kicker. You really don't need a squad of friends to reap the benefits of friendship. Friendship research has consistently shown that all people really need to protect themselves from bullying and from its related mental health issues is *one* good friend.

While girls with ADHD struggle with friendship, the summer camp study had a notable bright spot: Those girls were actually just as likely to make one friend as girls without ADHD. And though the friendships of girls with ADHD tended to include more negative interactions, there was no difference in the number of positive interactions in the friendships between the two groups. This suggests that—yes—there is more conflict in friendships when both girls have ADHD, but there is also a whole lot of positivity. And would you expect anything less from friendships that would (obviously) be characterized by impulsivity and emotional dysregulation? We are deeply feeling, but that goes both ways—in the direction of both positive and negative experiences.

IS ONE FRIEND ACTUALLY ENOUGH?

A follow-up study conducted in 2011 using the same sample of campers showed that the girls who displayed high levels of social-emotional challenges at the beginning of the summer expectedly experienced more bullying as the summer progressed. Importantly, though, this association was alleviated for girls who had at least one friend. It didn't matter if the girl had ADHD or not. *Or* if both girls in the friendship had ADHD. All girls—independent of these factors—significantly benefited from having one best friend.

This suggests that even though "birds of a feather flock together," and even though we tend to become more and more similar to our friends over time, this does not seem to pose a problem, at least for *girls* with ADHD. As a woman or a mom with an ADHD child—or for that matter, a therapist, coach or teacher—if you've ever worried about a child because they do not seem to have a lot of friends, please remind yourselves that you do not need an army of friends to experience protection from the negative effects of preexisting social-emotional challenges.

You only *need* ***one***.

And as long as the friendship is supportive and high quality, it doesn't matter if you're neurodivergent or if your friend is neurodivergent. The bottom line is that having one high-quality friendship can improve our outcomes by miles. *

Porcupine Love

FOR GIRLS WITH ADHD, FRIENDSHIP CAN BE PRICKLY BUT WARM.

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, had an interest in porcupines, those coarse mammals that scurry around recklessly, threatening to hurt us with a prick. One of Freud's colleagues even bought him a metal porcupine that once sat on Freud's desk, and now resides in The Freud Museum in London. In 1909, when Freud traveled to the U.S. to give a series of seminal lectures on psychoanalysis, his professional buddies, Carl Jung, Sándor Ferenczi and James Putnam, joked that what Freud really wanted was to see a wild porcupine and then "just incidentally give some lectures."

Why was Freud so fascinated by porcupines? Because they embody what's known as the porcupine dilemma. When it gets really cold, porcupines need to stay warm, so they huddle up against each other. This is certainly a dilemma for porcupines because they're spiky and injure each other in the process. Despite this, porcupines continue to huddle to keep each other warm. In his studies, Freud highlighted the porcupine dilemma as one example of how complicated interpersonal relationships really are—and that holds especially true for female friends with ADHD.

Their friendships can be enduring, but not for the faint of heart.

PART

4

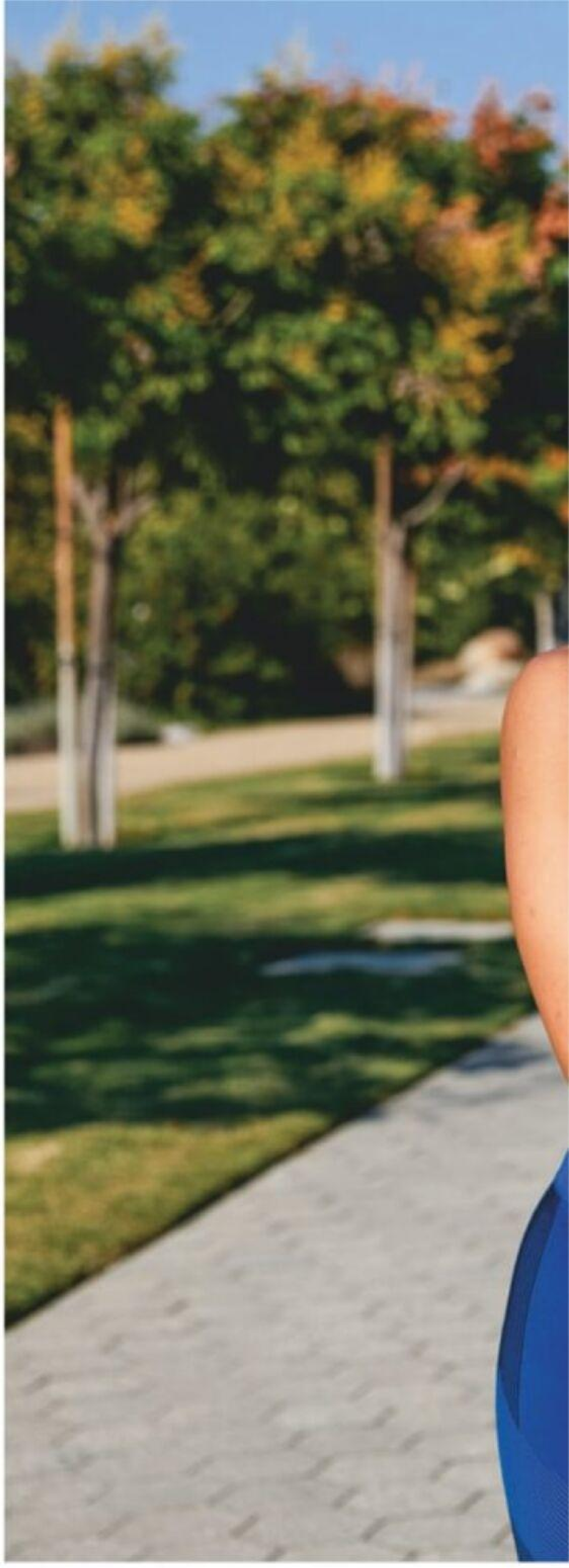
Crushing It

YES, CHALLENGES EXIST, BUT THE NEURODIVERGENT ADHD BRAIN PROVIDES WOMEN WITH REMARKABLE INTUITION AND CREATIVITY. TO HARNESS ITS FULL POTENTIAL, EXPLORE THESE EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING MEMORY, FOCUS AND PRODUCTIVITY.

+ Your brain thrives on novelty and surprise, so embrace them! To tackle mundane tasks, incorporate games and creative approaches that bring excitement and keep you engaged.

GAMIFY YOUR LIFE

SPICE THINGS UP! FIDGETS, WORK BUDDIES, AND A TOUCH OF SPARKLE CAN MAKE TASKS MORE ENGAGING, SPARK NEW IDEAS, AND BOOST MOTIVATION TO FOLLOW THROUGH.



Find A Body Double

Even if you've taken ADHD meds to fine-tune your concentration and undergone weeks or months of cognitive therapy, you may still find it arduous and daunting to accomplish lengthy tasks on your own. An increasingly popular and helpful strategy today is the body double, someone who can keep you company while you work, help you stay laser-focused and hold you accountable for the task at hand.

Do you have trouble starting or completing tasks? If so, the answer may be a body double—a person who works with or just alongside you as you get your task done. Whether your body double is right in the same room or shares a virtual space, they can help you stay focused or motivate you to get on with that project you've been putting off, explains Caroline Maguire, an ADHD coach and author of *Why Will No One Play With Me*?

Either way, a body double exerts a type of positive peer pressure that holds you accountable, adds Christal (Chris) Wang, CEO and co-founder of Shimmer, an ADHD coaching platform.

Who Can Be a Body Double?

They can be a real-world family member, work colleague or friend, or someone from one of the established virtual services supplying body doubles to those in need. Wang provides them in a virtual group setting through Shimmer. During the hour-long sessions, an entire group of paying clients work side by side, keeping each other on task.

What Should You Look for in a Body Double?

While your body double doesn't need to have ADHD, Maguire says they should be nonjudgmental about the diagnosis. Cena Block, a certified ADHD coach, adds that the body double should adhere to certain rules during the session. One guideline, for instance, might be relative silence. If someone is interrupting your workflow every five minutes, they won't help you to be productive. Another responsibility might be to provide feedback after the session or touch base with you periodically during one.

Some Tips To Ensure Your Session Is Effective:

1/ CREATE A GOAL. Wang says that at the beginning of her virtual body double groups, every participant must declare their individual objective. She says that stating your goal will help you remain focused when you get distracted.

2/ STRUCTURE YOUR TIME. Frame your body-double sessions with a set amount of time and include scheduled breaks. "In terms of your natural workflow, anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes total is probably a decent amount of time," says Block.

3/ RESERVE BODY DOUBLES FOR COMPLEX AND/OR BORING TASKS. If a task is easy or fun, don't use a body double. "It won't feel as effective" and won't really serve a purpose if you use one for a task you inherently enjoy, says Wang.

Whatever the task, tackling it with a friend or buddy not only makes it more enjoyable but also significantly boosts your ability to learn and perform.

4/ ASSESS YOUR SESSION. At the end of the session, check in with your body double and discuss what worked and what didn't work. If you've set an objective, assess whether you were able to reach your goal. Block says you shouldn't view the session as pass or fail but should simply gather data about what was helpful or not helpful; viewing the information as data rather than judgment allows you to problem-solve instead of criticizing your abilities.

Check Out the Options

Rustling up a real-world body double can be easier said than done. But you can improvise. If your task is exercise, go to a gym instead of working out at home. If your task is writing, you may be better off at a coffee shop. You can also watch body-double videos on YouTube for inspiration. These days, virtual body doubles and work environments are only a click away. In this age of hybrid and remote work, you don't need a formal ADHD diagnosis to seek a little help. Among the options, we suggest Focusmate, Shimmer, Flow Club, Flown and RescueTime. Google them online and kick the tires to see what works best.

—Cheryl Maguire

→ When something feels overwhelming and your mind starts to shut down, try introducing something unexpected and delightful to give your brain a dopamine boost—then push forward.

Add Some Sparkle

Do you lack the motivation to do boring repetitive tasks? Or, did a work system you were using for weeks suddenly lose its interest? Welcome to the ADHD brain, which is always craving novelty. When a task seems or has become boring, people with ADHD brains typically no longer want to do it. One way to cope with this is to resparkle-ize the task—a technique created by Barbara Luther, an ADHD coach. Basically, you are "glamming the task back up again," says ADHD coach Caroline Maguire.

Why Do You Need to Resparkle-ize?

People with ADHD have lower levels of dopamine—a neurotransmitter that can suffuse the brain with good feelings, rewarding you for certain tasks. "People with ADHD generally will get bored of things easily," says Shimmer co-founder Wang. ADHD coaching platform. When this happens, their dopamine levels drop.

When Do You Need to Resparkle-ize?

If you've been doing a task like laundry without any issues for weeks but then a huge pile of dirty clothes builds up, it's probably time to resparkle-ize. "It's important that we switch things up" to increase interest and motivation, says Wang.

Resparkle-izing Tips To Get You Through Those Onerous Tasks:

1/ JUST DO IT. ADHD coach Cena Block explains that the first step in resparkle-izing is accepting that not all tasks are fun. "There's a fallacy that everything has to be exciting. It's just not true," she says. You don't need to feel motivated to do all tasks, you just need to do them.

2/ ADD URGENCY. Jessica McCabe, author of the book *How to ADHD*, says adding a sense of urgency helps motivate you to do the task. One way to clean your house with urgency, she explains, is to invite a friend over so that you have a reason and a timeline to do it. Another way to add urgency? Use a stopwatch and try to beat the clock.

3/ USE A BODY DOUBLE. If you have someone present during a task like cleaning, you can talk while you work.

4/ CREATE A GAME. Maguire explains that you can gamify those dull or boring tasks. If you are loading the dishwasher, how many plates can you fit in? Or, if you are putting away your laundry at the same time as another person, try creating a race to see who finishes first. On that endless drive, see how many state license plates you can count—and can you beat folks in the back seat? Anything you can score or rank is going to help.

5/ CHANGE YOUR ENVIRONMENT. If you normally work in your office or alone at home, try working in a coffee shop, restaurant or among others at the library. Sometimes a simple change of scenery is enough to make the task at hand seem substantially different enough to increase your productivity, at least for a certain period of time."It's a different temperature setting, and there are generally different sounds," explains Wang. ***—Cheryl Maguire***

Go Ahead and Fidget

IT JUST MIGHT BE YOUR SECRET PRODUCTIVITY WEAPON

Remember being told to "sit still and focus"? That age-old advice might actually be wrong. Groundbreaking research suggests that those little movements we often try to suppress could be our brain's natural way of staying alert and engaged, especially for people with ADHD.

"We have good evidence that fidgeting itself seems to be associated with better attention," explains Julie Schweitzer, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the UC Davis MIND Institute. Her new study shows that those small, repetitive movements—from doodling to foot-tapping—might be nature's way of helping ADHD brains stay on task.

Think of fidgeting as your brain's built-in focus-boosting system. Those seemingly pointless movements, which Dr. Schweitzer calls "intrinsic fidgeting," serve a vital purpose. "What was really interesting was the longer the task went on, the greater the effect of the fidgeting," she shares. As attention wanes, people fidget more and perhaps this helps maintain focus and regulation."

So what does this mean for you? Whether you're a parent watching your child twist in their chair during homework or an adult who can't help clicking your pen during meetings, it's time to reshape how we think about movement during focused tasks. Those little movements might be exactly what your brain needs to stay engage and do better on cognitive tasks .

The key is finding the sweet spot between helpful movement and disruptive behavior. While flashy fidget toys might be too distracting for the workplace or classroom, simple movements like leg swinging or quiet pen clicking could make the difference between frustration and focus. Schweitzer also suggests incorporating intentional movement breaks during longer tasks—think quick stretching sessions or short walks, rather than social media breaks that can turn into hour-long distractions.

For parents, teachers and managers alike, consider accommodations that allow for non-disruptive movement. Current research is even exploring whether fidgeting might help with emotional regulation during times of stress or anxiety—suggesting that these small movements might be your body's way of self-regulating.

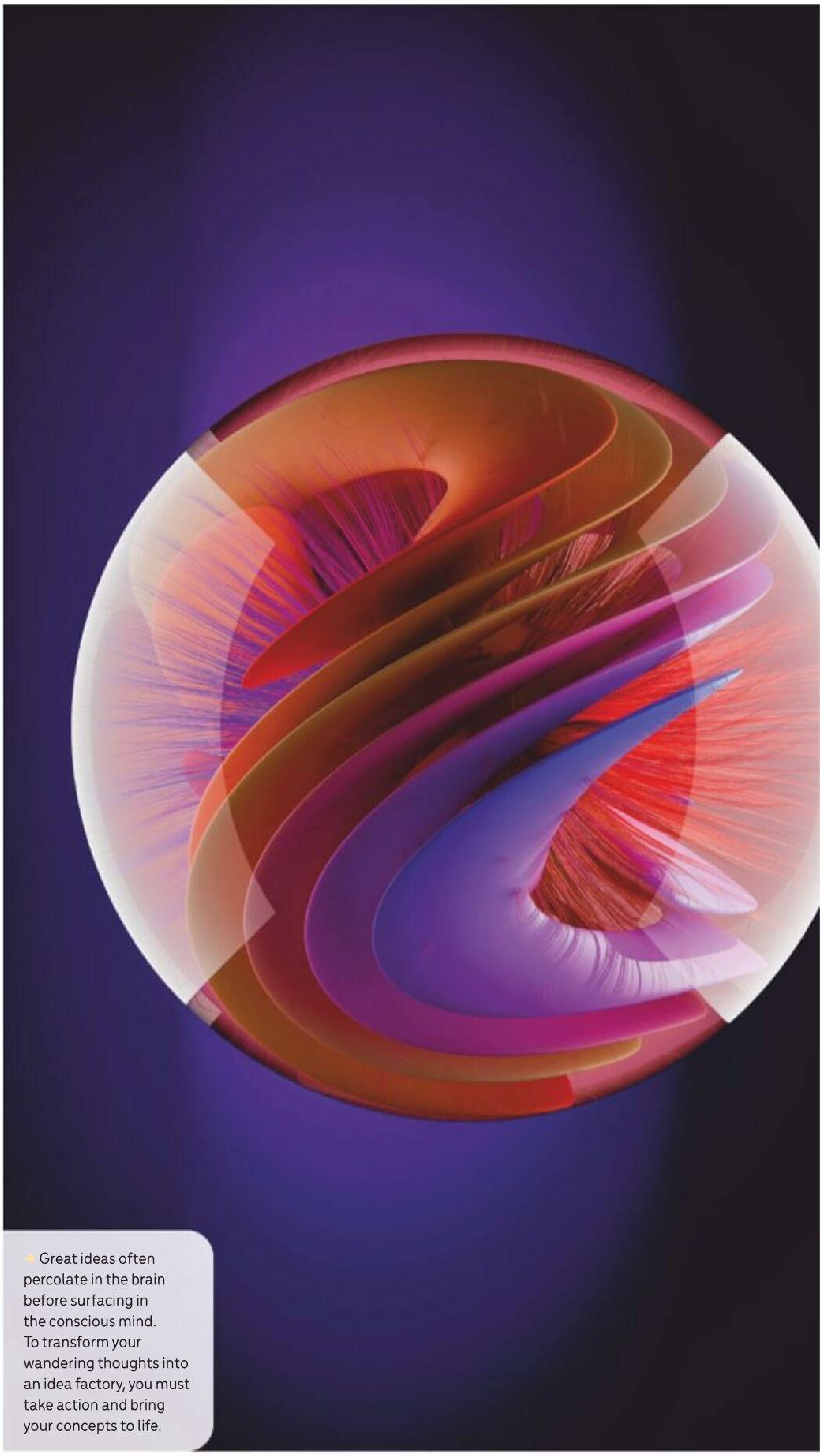
It's time to embrace the wiggle and find your own rhythm to focus and succeed.
—Pamela Weintraub

Tame Your Brain, Incubate Brilliant Ideas

The world's greatest thinkers can find inspiration, hatch concepts, and come to that aha moment at will. ADHD brains excel here, but you still need to tame the beast. You might find yourself trying to envision a creative solution to a difficult problem—something as mundane and truly boring as a logistical challenge in your work life, such as trying to squeeze four desks into a room meant for only two. After spending an hour trying various configurations, you decide to take a break for lunch.

As you walk past a park, you notice people playing chess. Then at your favorite Mediterranean restaurant, grilled sardines are a special. As you eat them, you find yourself reflecting on the challenge of trying to fit too many desks into a room like sardines in a can. The image of the chess players seated opposite each other in the park also flashes through your mind. In a moment of inspiration, you realize that by putting two larger desks into the room, two people can sit across from each other and there will still be enough extra space for your co-workers to move around freely.

This is the kind of divergent thinking that ADHD brains do so well



→ Great ideas often percolate in the brain before surfacing in the conscious mind. To transform your wandering thoughts into an idea factory, you must take action and bring your concepts to life.

—but to implement the solution, you must clear a space for intention and analysis to filter in. That's where the techniques of idea incubation come in. Psychologists have been studying the stages of creative inspiration for nearly a century but only recently began connecting this process to changes in the brain. In a seminal study, researchers John Kounios of Drexel University and Mark Beeman of Northwestern found that the neural activity of volunteers trying to solve word problems differed when they worked methodically and analytically versus when they relied on spontaneous insights.

Their findings suggest that we unconsciously think about solutions before insights emerge in our conscious awareness. That process involves neural functioning that is different from mere mundane analysis. Other researchers suggest that the brain anticipates which approach should work for a given problem before we are consciously aware of solving it. Drawing upon this ongoing research, and with a nod to the intuitive power of the neurodivergent mind, we suggest these steps to help you incubate your next big idea.

6 Steps to Greatness

1/ CHOOSE YOUR SPACE.
To promote a creatively receptive state of mind, arrange a suitably inspirational workspace. It might be a particular rock on a cliff overlooking the ocean, a favorite table in a neighborhood cafe, or a comfortable spot in your living room. It can be any special place that is conducive to letting your thoughts flow.

> **"Light bulb moments happen when you least expect them: while washing your hair, taking a walk, or falling into and out of dreams."**
>
> ~ KEITH HARARY, PH.D., AND ELAINE DONAHUE ROBINSON, PH.D., PSYCHOLOGISTS

2/ REFLECT ON THE QUESTION.
An essential part of finding the right answer is asking the right question. You might be obsessing on trying to fit too many desks into a crowded space, when the question is really all about fitting the right number of people into the room in a way that feels less crowded. Allow yourself to mentally step back and reflect on the way you might need to change your approach to the problem—or simply do your best to define the problem as clearly as possible while turning it over to your creative imagination.

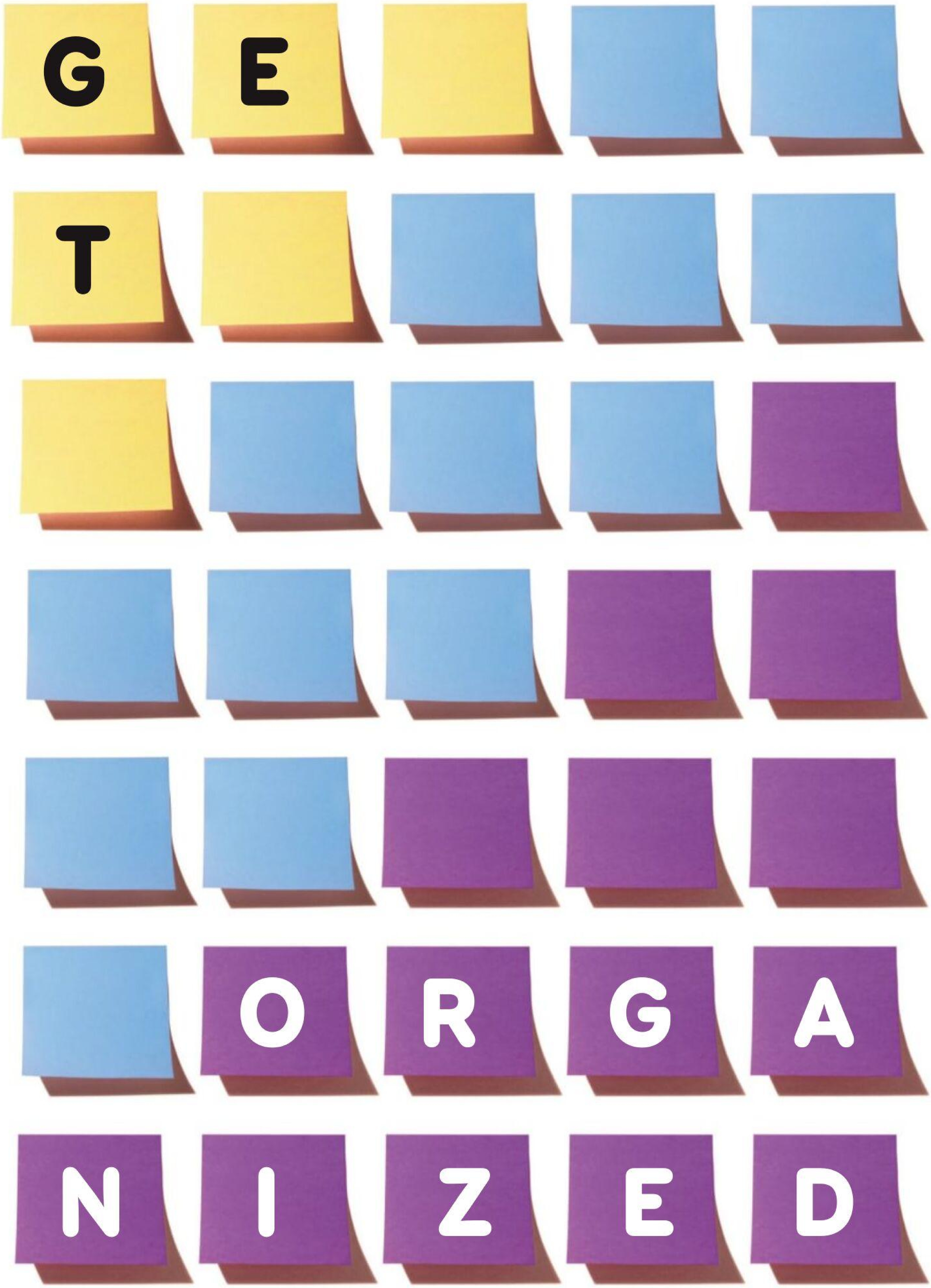
3/ OPEN YOUR MIND.
Being receptive to creative inspiration means more than just gathering information about how others approach similar situations. Beyond trying to absorb entirely conventional information, just calmly observe the world and watch for unexpected patterns and possibilities that could help you view your situation from an unusual perspective. You might, for example, be inspired to invent a new kind of life vest while watching leaves float down a river.

4/ CHANGE YOUR FOCUS.
The most unexpected element of incubating inspiration may be the significance of letting go and turning the problem over to your creative subconscious. Research reported by Adam Galinsky of Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management and his colleagues suggests that distractions may be helpful in coming up with creative solutions, something the ADHD brain excels at, but they must be followed by a phase of conscious thought to process those solutions and apply them. (That's where this exercise comes in.)

5/ LATHER, RINSE AND REPEAT.
If you still find yourself feeling stuck, don't force the issue. Instead, try to relax and continue the process of gathering information and observing the world around you.

6/ MAKE YOUR IMAGINATION REAL.
Once you envision an original approach to your particular challenge, make the leap from merely holding that idea to applying it. Go ahead and explore your new approach to music on your favorite instrument. Try out that business concept. Invite your friends to add their own ideas and reactions to your original approach. In the process, you may develop an even deeper and more ingenious insight that emerges when you least expect it. And one last note: If exploring your creative style raises questions that call for more discussion, the assistance of a therapist can help.

—Keith Harary, Ph.D., and Eileen Donahue Robinson, Ph.D.



GET ORGANIZED

Struggling with your to-do list? Try these methods—and feel free to use one until it fails (or bores) you, then push on to the next.

→ ***By Tara Haelle***

By definition, ADHD is a deficit in executive function, including the ability to plan, organize and coordinate tasks. More and more, coaches have entered the scene with cognitive tools and apps to help.

ADHD coach Tamara Rosier, Ph.D., author of *You, Me, and Our ADHD Family*, for instance, teaches clients to use the "Solve-It Grid" to "track how they use their energy and how they are motivated" so they can figure out why certain tasks are so difficult to accomplish.

The Solve-It Grid is a quadrant of four colors: upper left has the red activities—not fun, but need to be done. Upper right is green—they're fun and give you energy. Yellow in the lower left are the mundane, boring tasks, and blue in the lower right are fun but sap your energy.

Julian Nowogrodzki, a 41-year-old neurodivergent science journalist based in Boston, prefers a version of the Eisenhower Matrix. In the classic version, you create a four-square grid. Upper left is urgent—do it now. Upper right is not urgent—schedule it. Lower left is not important but needs to be done—delegate it. Lower right is a distraction—delete it. But Nowogrodzki mixes the elements like this: upper left is "important and urgent," lower left is "important, not urgent," upper right is "want to do," and lower right is "cluttering up my mind"— a space to dump distractions so you can focus on the other stuff.

A BAG FULL OF TRICKS

The point for ADHD minds, however, is not so much finding a method and sticking with it, but learning to mash and mix it up.

Allie Hillier, a 54-year-old manager of student academic support at the University of Newcastle in New South Wales, Australia, only got her ADHD diagnosis three years ago, but she's already been helping students improve their productivity for 15 years.

"The light bulb moment for me was realizing I had been hacking my way through my entire life, and I had hit on some hacks that worked," she says. "But the other side of that is that my hacks won't work for everyone." And ultimately, that's the closest thing to a key when it comes to finding successful systems for organization and productivity that people with ADHD can harness—there isn't one that works universally.

"There's no simple trick. There's no single system. There's no magic app," she says. So just pick a system, try it out, and use it as long as you can. "And when it stops working in three weeks or three months or six days, let it go. Push it to the side and pick up something else. Don't be scared of trying new things, and don't feel shame and guilt when the thing stops working."

Nowogrodzki certainly agrees. After trying about 10 different systems over the years, they eventually found four or five they tend to rotate through, including their revision of Eisenhower Matrix. "I do something until it becomes untenable, and then I stop," Nowogrodzki said. "I don't know why the systems stop working. I feel like my whole life is just littered with the bones of abandoned organization."

MAKE IT MOTIVATING

The problem isn't making a to-do list. It's organizing the list in a way that's motivating instead of paralyzing. It's making a list you can actually follow while fending off the million other tasks and ideas cluttering your brain.

"It's a fine balance between, 'I have to write everything down or I forget it,' and 'If I have too many things I'm looking at, I get overwhelmed,'" Nowogrodzki says. "I need to write stuff down before it disappears

> "It's a fine balance between, 'I have to write everything down or I forget it' and 'If I have too many things I'm looking at, I get overwhelmed.'"
>
> ~ JULIAN NOWOGRODZKI, SCIENCE JOURNALIST

somewhere, but for the actual to-do list, I need to organize it."

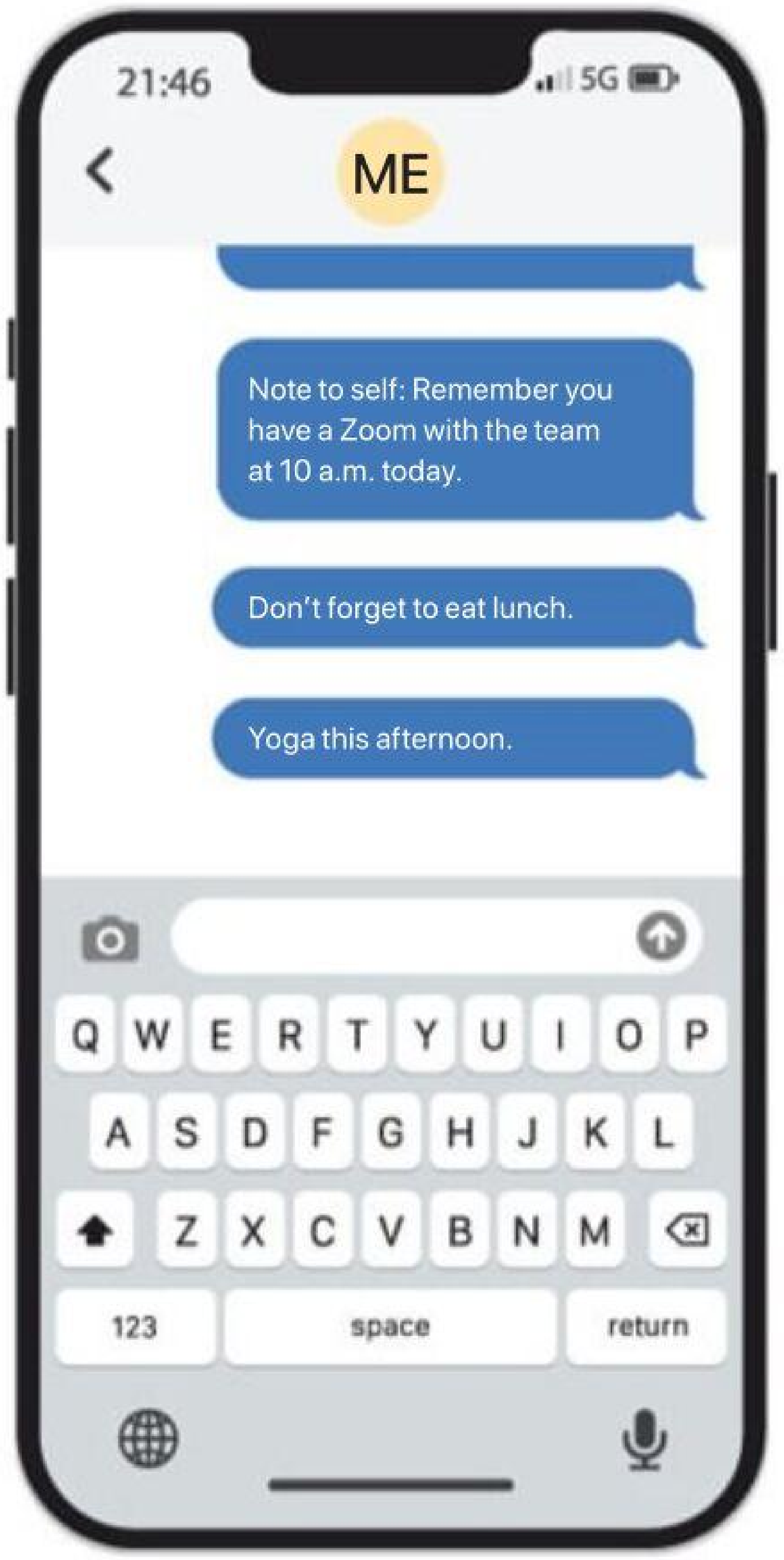
One reason this strategy of switching systems might work for those with ADHD is the novelty of switching to something new when your current method becomes stale, boring, tedious, or simply too familiar.

"Motivation is important," Nowogrodzki says. "The to-do list has to not kill my motivation, and sometimes when I'm stuck, it's because the to-do list is killing my motivation."

BALANCING ACTS

Understanding where different tasks fall on the motivational spectrum of Rosier's Solve-It Grid enables people to balance out their days. A to-do list of nothing but red and yellow will never get done, or possibly even started. But tossing in some green and ending the day with blue can motivate you to get through the rest.

12
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11



Note to self: Remember you have a Zoom with the team at 10 a.m. today.

Don't forget to eat lunch.

Yoga this afternoon.

> **Time blindness is the inability to intuitively judge just how much time has passed. Alarm apps on your phone (and even something as simple as an old school alarm clock) to stop you from falling into the endless abyss of a task are critical tools.**

Rosier also recommends looking for tasks you can off-load, delegate, negotiate. If unloading the dishwasher is your most dreaded task, can you permanently trade it with your partner for a different task?

"If you can understand what you're unconsciously avoiding, it makes other productivity systems work better," Rosier says.

Hillier also tells students to banish the word "should" from their vocabulary. "'Should' is the most dangerous, damaging word," she says. "You're comparing yourself to other people's behavior, to the neurotypicals around you." And that can put extra pressure on you that you simply don't need.

It doesn't matter what systems others choose to use or don't choose to use, she says. "The trick is to have as many tools as possible at your disposal and giving yourself permission to switch between tools and to understand that having a stash of resources available is incredibly powerful and empowering." *

Getting Started

The types of organizational methods most likely to work for people with ADHD are colorful, flexible and kinesthetic—something literally tangible. Julian Nowogrodzki uses both analog and digital tools, depending on what's needed. "Physical is very important because I think better and remember things better when I write them down with my hands, and I need to have something I can look at that will not direct me into an internet wormhole," they say. "But then digital has the advantage of being more efficient with space and being searchable."

It also helps if you can gamify your to-do list—like having a contest with yourself—for a built-in dopamine hit. For example, see how much of your old stuff you can throw away. "The ability to throw things away is essential because the temptation to keep it 'just in case I might need it later' is really, really strong," Allie Hillier says. And the thrill of throwing something out is motivating too. But it's also fine to use multiple methods at once for redundancy—backups and fail-safes can be essential.

Analog System Ideas

QUICK REMINDERS: Get a manila folder and put Post-it notes inside as ideas come into your head. "It's like a little external hard-drive brain, a portable memory," Hillier says. "I don't have to keep it all in my head."

NOTES TO SELF: Write down what you need to for however many days feels right. When you can, go through the notes and toss what you don't need. Replace paper as needed.

THE TO-DO DUMP: Write down everything taking up space in your head that you need to do or is making you anxious. Then number the items in terms of priority and in terms of what you think you can really do. Alternate difficult and easy tasks. Not every task needs a number—just the ones you start with.

TIME YOURSELF: Make a list of the next several hours of work and assign an estimate of how long each task will take. Then time each task to see how close you got. Not only does the gamification keep you on task, but it helps you feel more realistic about what you can get done in the time you have.

ORGANIZE TASKS BY THEIR EMOTIONAL SALIENCE: Start with fun or easy projects, work up to a single "impossible task," then reward yourself with another fun, easy one that gives you a sense of accomplishment. Put different colored Post-its or index cards on a bulletin board so you can move them around. Colors can represent categories of items, such as physical errands, "electronic errands" (such as email or paying bills), housekeeping, deep-thought tasks, phone calls, etc. Similarly keep half-size colored index cards in envelopes you can carry around and sift through like a deck of cards.

PUT MINI POST-ITS of different colors on a single white sheet of paper. Move them around to prioritize them as needed.

MATCH ONE HARD TASK with two easy or fun tasks.

KEEP SEPARATE, different-colored folders where each has things to do in it based on category or energy level.

FEELING MOTIVATED FOR A TOUGH TASK? Grab the red folder, knowing the green one is your reward.

KEEP A 3-RING BINDER with dividers for various differing task types.

USE A PORTABLE WHITE BOARD

Digital Aids

GOOGLE CALENDAR, ICAL, OUTLOOK—but sync all your electronic calendars together.

EMAIL YOURSELF, especially with scheduled emails.

TEXT YOURSELF, and mark the texts "unread" until you respond to them.

USE THE NOTES FUNCTION in your phone and create categories/folders to organize ideas, lists, and other information. Or, use Evernote, Google Keep, Things, Goblin, or similar apps. It's fine to use one until it's no longer useful and then try another, or use different ones for different needs.

TAKE PHOTOS of things you need to do and email them to yourself, or keep them in assigned photo folders.

RECORD IMPORTANT LISTS on spreadsheets.

USE THE ONLINE ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEM TRELLO, or something similar.

Other Tips

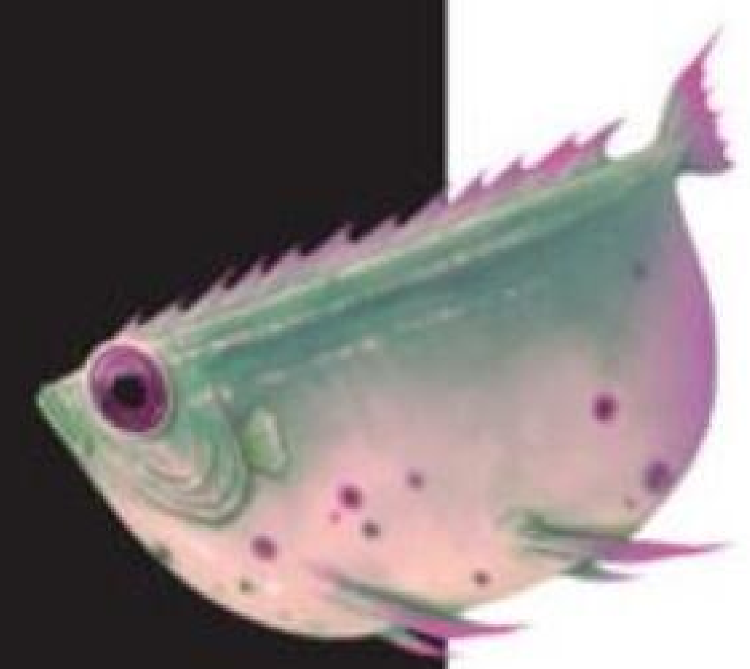
People with ADHD often lack interoception, the ability to recognize what's happening in their body. It's why you don't realize you're hungry until you're hangry, or that you need water until you have a dehydration headache, or that you're tired until your head nods. So set alarms to remind yourself to eat, drink, take a break, exercise, etc. And if you take a break by going to social media or playing a game on your phone, set an alarm to remind you to go back to work before you're sucked into a time void.

→ Women with ADHD are known for extraordinary creativity, but not in every sphere of life. Their creative energy is poured most fiercely into those projects and endeavors that they care about passionately, providing them with the greatest reward.

Going WITH THE Flow

When women with ADHD unleash their wandering minds, intuition, imagination and creativity soar to new heights.

→ **By Gilly Kahn, Ph.D.**



i was 4 when my mom died and 7 when she cameoed as a skeleton at my birthday party. But she wasn't the scary, decaying type of skeleton. Not the one with dry, brittle black streaks woven in and out of its decomposing bones. *Au contraire.* My mother was a cheerful cartoonish skeleton. You know—the kind that wears a fuchsia feather-brimmed hat and clickety-clacks on the tile floor.

As a little girl, I had mixed feelings about this dream. On the one hand, I had my mom back, which was heartwarming. But on the other hand, she was—well—dead. Any rational adult might interpret this experience as the typical grief response of a typical little girl.

But what if, by rationalizing our dreams and boiling them down to concrete explanations, we are missing out on something more important? What if our dreams, our fluid imaginative experiences, and our gut feelings have a deeper, more meaningful purpose that deserves more of our attention? Too often, we underestimate what our minds are capable of achieving when we just let them run free.

As young girls, we absorb sensory input in a way that is much more open-minded, curious and imaginative than when we reach adulthood.

We free flow into mind wandering. We embrace it, we get lost in it, and we may even take the information it produces seriously. Buddhist tradition celebrates children's open curiosity to the world around and within them by describing children's perspective as a "beginner's mind."

The neuropsychiatrist Daniel Siegel describes something similar in what he refers to as *bottom-up processing*, which occurs when we attend to our internal experiences and the external world in an open-minded and free-flowing kind of way. When we use bottom-up processing, we are not necessarily tapping into any existing knowledge because we are tending to sensory input as if it's something completely new and noteworthy.

This is different from *top-down processing*, which pulls from our existing knowledge and past experiences to solve a problem or to make sense of new information. Top-down processing is somewhat biased because it is shaped by our expectations and established understandings of how the world works (which would not be helpful in every single situation).

Schools are often organized around the top-down mode: We want our children to sit up in their chairs with their feet planted on the ground. We want them to read silently to themselves. We expect them to "just focus" on the assignment that is in front of them. This is a system that is arguably mechanical and overly structured in the top-down mode.

As we grow older, this style becomes entrenched. But the problem is that if we overrely on prior experience—if we focus *too* much on what's come before instead of looking around us and turning inward—we can be blinded to new possibilities, ending up instead with a kind of permanent tunnel vision through life.

The sea of creativity, where women with ADHD literally swim, comes from a penchant for bottom-up processing, from what Siegel calls "beginner's eyes." And the vehicle for all this imagination, all this divergent thinking, is the wandering mind, a particular quality of the ADHD brain.

GETTING TO THE SOURCE

Our brain is composed of groups of finely tuned orchestrated systems, also known as brain networks. In neurotypical brains, the *task positive network*, or TPN, activates when we are focused on a specific goal. For example, when someone faces a deadline for a college paper, their TPN is mostly active while they are sitting, planning and writing their paper.

Another one of these brain networks, the *default mode network* (DMN),

← Highly attuned to social signals, women with ADHD are especially sensitive to slights. However, this heightened awareness also allows them to intuit the emotions of others, often resulting in gut feelings about people or situations that are remarkably accurate.

ideally lowers its volume during the paper-writing process so that it doesn't interfere with completing the assignment. Composed of the brain areas that drive imagination and mind wandering, the DMN generally raises its volume (or becomes more active) when we're in a resting state, not actively working on that task in front of us.

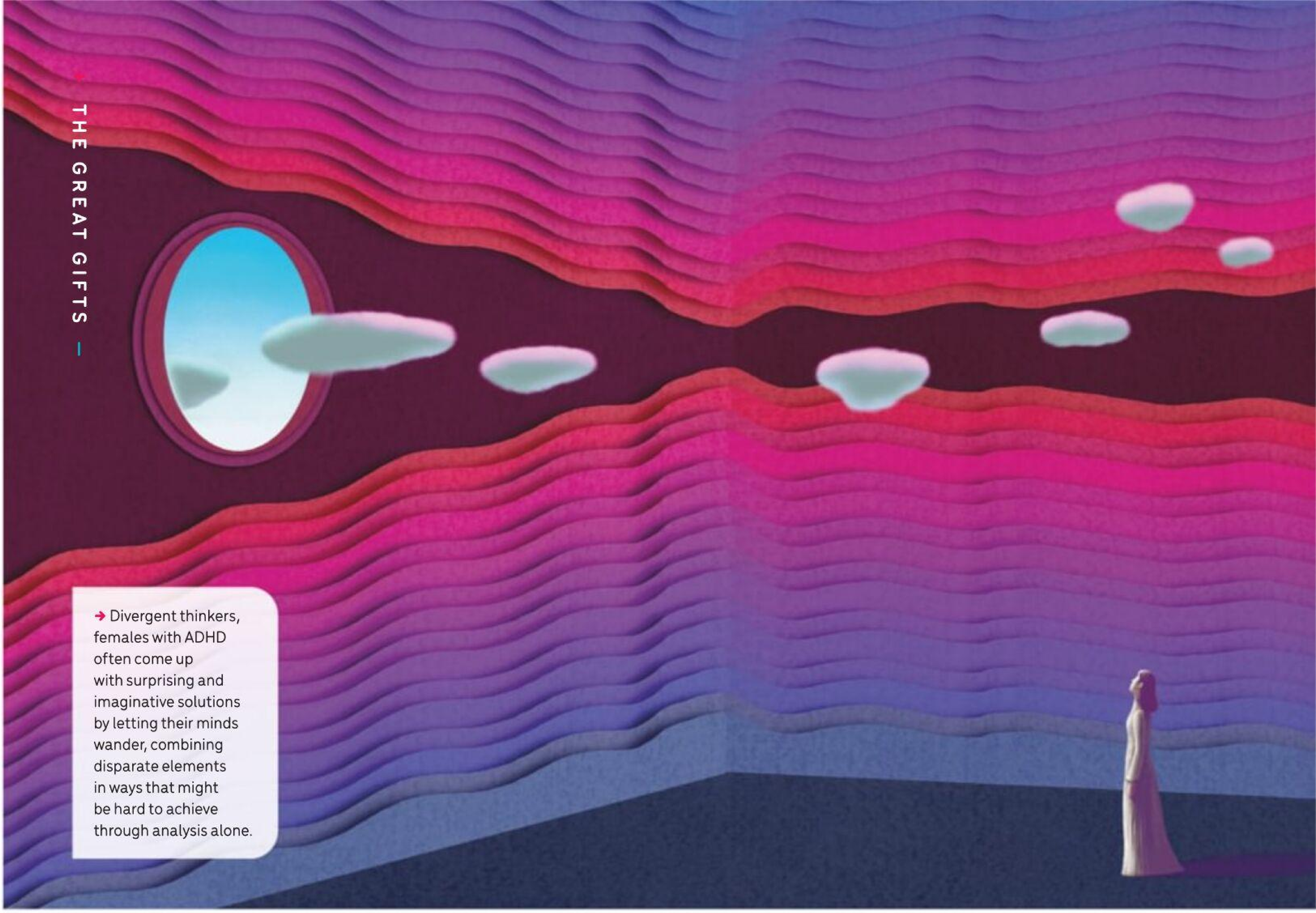
The DMN is the master of the night, often when we are dreaming and asleep. The DMN steers the ship when you sit in front of a book and suddenly realize you've spent the last few minutes unintentionally living in your own head. Your body was facing the book, but your brain was reviewing, perhaps, social mistakes you made, what others may think about you because of those mistakes, and how you might fix them in the future. All the while the concrete task that is a part of the physical world sits in front of you, neglected and untouched. *Oops.* The DMN places heavy emphasis on thoughts relevant to our interactions with others, which is what most women tend to think about the most.

THE SOCIAL BRAIN

ADHD experts Drs. Edward Hallowell and John Ratey jokingly call the DMN the "demon" in their book *ADHD 2.0*. This is because the DMN interferes with the TPN, right when ADHDers try to complete a task that requires us to focus. The challenge in the ADHD brain is that the DMN continues chugging along like *The Little Engine That Could,* even when we really need it to shut up. Functional brain imagery shows that, conversely, in individuals without ADHD, the DMN becomes significantly less active in situations where the TPN is more relevant and helpful.

The DMN functions as "white noise" that buzzes consistently in the backs of people's minds, whether they have ADHD or not. But in people with ADHD, especially women, it is active most of the time.

Because the female brain is motivated to avoid social rejection, it makes sense that even at a resting state, our brains compel us to ruminate about what has happened before, especially in our relationships. This is rooted in neuroscience too: The region of the brain called the insula, which governs our ability to perceive pain and to experience a sense of self in relation to others, is more strongly connected to the DMN in women than it is in men. This can partially explain the



➔ Divergent thinkers, females with ADHD often come up with surprising and imaginative solutions by letting their minds wander, combining disparate elements in ways that might be hard to achieve through analysis alone.

phenomenon of rejection sensitivity dysphoria (RSD), which refers to extreme sensitivity to perceived or actual criticism. Although there is not a whole lot of research about RSD, the available work shows that women with ADHD are particularly susceptible. And because RSD often involves a piercing, physical sensation of pain, it makes sense that the brain area governing pain perception (the insula) is close buddies with the DMN in females.

FOUNTAIN OF CREATIVITY

But for all the trouble it causes, the overactive default mode network confers important gifts on women with ADHD. Having a buzzing, turned-on DMN is associated with increased creativity, which explains why so many women with ADHD pursue professions and often lifetime careers in the arts.

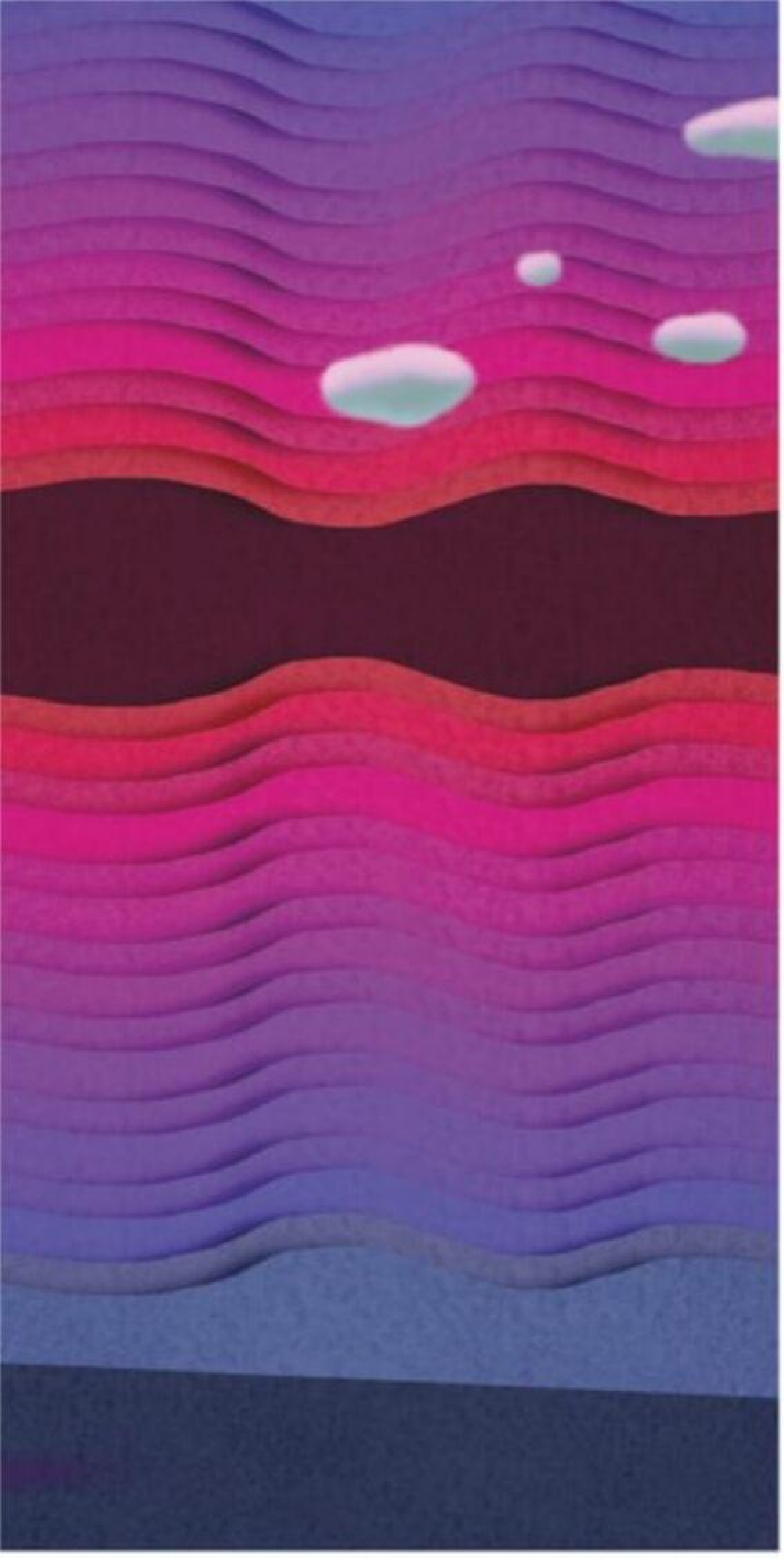
Studies also distinguish between two types of creativity: divergent (relying on bottom-up processing) and convergent (relying on top-down processing). Research shows that high-IQ ADHDers display higher levels of divergent creativity than neurotypical individuals, suggesting that people with ADHD work best when they have the freedom to choose their projects and unleash their creative output as they wish.

Contrary to the oversimplified picture of the DMN as a "disrupter," DMN activity is actually crucial to learning, problem-solving and creativity itself. Creativity seems to be associated with dream recall, which is related to an active DMN.

The authors of a 2024 article in *Behavioral Sciences* have also associated heightened DMN activity with "subconscious" or intuitive intelligence. Obviously, overreliance on analytical thinking could cause you to miss counterintuitive solutions further afield. Sometimes, real solutions come when neurons communicate with seemingly unrelated brain areas to reach a solution. Mark Stefik, an expert on enhanced performance at the Palo Alto Research Center, has even argued that DMN activation leads to those life-altering "Aha!" moments, when great ideas emerge full-blown.

INTUITIVE LEAPS

One fascinating connection between the female brain and our social behavior involves the popular concept of "female intuition"—an ineffable mental capacity that is tapped to answer a question or solve a problem without going through the process of logical reasoning. Neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine, author of *The Female*



Brain, explains, "The relationship between a woman's gut feelings and intuitive hunches is grounded in biology." Compared to men, women are more likely to feel intense emotions, particularly ones that are tied to social circumstances (like social rejection in the case of RSD). Unlike men, women tend to be highly proficient at quickly assessing what another person is thinking or feeling just by looking at them.

In a brain-scan study where women were told their romantic partners were being shocked in another room, women's brains activated pain areas though they were not the ones being physically hurt. Brizendine explains that these results could not be replicated in men when their partners were being shocked and that women seem to have an ability to walk "in another's brain ... not just their shoes."

In a sense, women using intuitive thinking are engaging in bottom-up processing—they are using a beginner's mind. Intuition inherently requires an openness to internal sensory experiences. That is, you need to be able to go with the flow and respond to your body's internal cues to make an intuitive choice.

We think of "gut feelings" as unpleasant sensations that originate in the gut, an idea supported by research. The enteric nervous system, often called the "second brain" and located in the gut, is thought to be where we receive emotional, sensory and intuitive messages. (It also happens to control the autonomic nervous system, which regulates functions we don't consciously direct, such as heart rate, body temperature, breathing and digestion.)

As women, should we listen to and take our gut feelings seriously? A 2022 Chinese study on intuition published in *Science* suggests that we really should. The researchers presented women and men with a difficult task while assessing their behavioral and neural patterns. Expectedly, in line with previous findings, women tended to respond to test questions by relying on intuition, while men tended to use analytical thinking.

That in itself is no surprise. But the women in the study actually had shorter reaction times and were more accurate in their responses than men, even when relying on intuition. The authors added that past studies probably found that women tended to be "wrong" in their intuitive responses because the tasks provided relied on mathematical or spatial reasoning instead of a more neutral or language-based task.

Altogether, these findings paint a special portrait of the inner workings of the female brain. Compared to men, women have (probably as a result of interwoven nature and nurture) an uncanny ability to tap into very abstract, social, sensory and emotionally laden content. And they do this in a relatively quick, fluent, creative and accurate way. Women with ADHD take this gift to a higher level still.

> **"Something is always born of excess: Great art was born of great terrors, great loneliness, great instabilities, and it always balances them."**
>
> ~ ANAIS NIN

Sure, our female ADHD brains can (and do) often interfere in situations where we are expected to sit still with our feet planted on the ground—when the world wants us to "just focus" on cognitively strenuous (and boring) tasks. But we can also contribute novel and innovative ideas when we are given the chance to nurture what our brain does best: wander.

It's time we practice loving and cultivating this imaginative, free-flowing, intuitive aspect of ourselves. And it's time that others start recognizing the benefits of this part of us too.

For all I know, my mother visiting me in my dream as a decorated skeleton was her own and the universe's way of sending me a message. As a woman with ADHD, I cannot help but vividly and physically experience such a sensitive dream, even 28 years later. And I encourage you to celebrate those intuitive, creative, and boundless aspects of your brain too. *

ADVOCATE FOR YOU AND YOURS

Make the world bend your way by asserting your rights and asking for what you need.

→ ***By Davia Sills***

When it comes to ADHD, getting diagnosed is just the beginning of a lifelong odyssey. At first, girls with the diagnosis rely on their parents to advocate for them and help them access the treatment and accommodations they need to do their best at school and in relationships. But don't mistake advocacy for overprotection: "Advocacy isn't the same as putting a cocoon around a child and protecting them from the world," explains Rona Renner, R.N., a parenting coach, temperament specialist, and author of *Is That Me Yelling?*

PARENTS AS ADVOCATES

Shortly after their daughter is diagnosed with ADHD, parents quickly become well-versed in the condition. They must then decide whether to start her on medication and determine the level of accommodations she requires. A first step is turning to the special education resource teacher at the school for an evaluation. Once a girl with ADHD has been evaluated, her parents can request an individualized education program (IEP). This gives the child certain allowances for the complexities of having ADHD.

WHAT YOU CAN ASK FOR

Among the accommodations parents can request on an IEP, psychologist Ellen Littman, Ph.D., mentions:

- More time on tests and a quiet, distraction-free place to take them
- A seat in the front of the class
- Frequent encouragement and positive reinforcement
- A study buddy who is friendly and organized
- Regular breaks where she can move around

By evaluating each child's individual strengths and needs, parents and teachers can develop strategies that help students with ADHD reach their full potential.

- Agreement to only call on her when she raises her hand

Before such accommodations can begin, of course, requests must be placed in writing—and then you may need to wait 60 days before they officially begin.

However, when a student isn't failing and isn't disruptive (most girls with ADHD are not), schools may reject an IEP—even if that girl is falling far short of her potential. At that point, parents may consider asking for a 504 plan, "which has less teeth ... It doesn't have the same regulations federally, but it will give some accommodation," Renner explains.

When all you can get is a 504 plan (or not even that), it's the presence of the parent that ensures that accommodations to ease the impact of ADHD stay in place. Parents must show up to regular follow-up meetings and get comfortable communicating with their daughter's teachers and other staff, many of whom may be naturally inclined to help. The key is to build a collaborative relationship and avoid getting defensive. Renner advises parents, "Always start with, 'I appreciate all you've done here, but we're still struggling with X, Y and Z. What can we do about it?'" Ultimately, everyone wants the best outcome for the child. However, it can be harder to secure support for a girl

who quietly struggles and flies under the radar than for a hyperactive, disruptive boy, whose challenges are more noticeable.

Most importantly, parents need to discover their daughter's strengths and what she loves, because that passion—whether it's dancing or art or airplanes—is what will help pull her through school intact. Renner elaborates, “The thing about ADHD is that these girls often have such great minds and talents. They see things in a global perspective. They really can thrive. This is a child who can be very brilliant in the world in a way that you never expected.”

↙ Whether or not you choose to disclose your ADHD to your employer and colleagues, your work life will be less stressful and more successful if you clearly communicate your needs, as well as the tasks and conditions that help you perform at your best.

PASSING THE BATON

Extroverted, shy, impulsive, introverted—all children come into the world with different temperaments. And every daughter with ADHD will need varying levels of support and independence as she develops the skills to thrive.

The ultimate goal is to teach your daughter to advocate for herself. But that is going to be a process. The first step, according to Renner, is to enlist her in troubleshooting the issue. Perhaps her teacher is upset with her for not turning in homework—ask her to come up with a solution herself, even if she needs your help implementing it. Maybe the solution is having teachers check her special homework folder. Perhaps she can email her homework in. Just coming up with ideas is a first step.

But the bottom line is still this: While it behooves parents to teach their daughters with ADHD to advocate for themselves, there's no set age when a parent can pull the plug on their assistance. Some girls need parents to advocate for them through high school. Your daughter, like all kids with ADHD, is developmentally behind when it comes to executive function and social skills, but give her time and she will catch up enough to take care of herself—it just may be later than you think.

“Some kids need advocacy through college, but it gets less and less,” says Renner. If adults with neurotypical brains still have difficulty standing up for themselves, it should come as no surprise that it takes time for girls with ADHD to learn how to self-advocate—and parents can be an invaluable source of love and support throughout the process.

> **“These girls often have such great minds and talents. They see things in a global perspective. They really can thrive. This is a child who can be very brilliant … in a way that you never expected.”**
>
> ~ RONA RENNER, R.N., PARENTING COACH

THE DECISION TO SELF-DISCLOSE

Once a young woman with ADHD graduates from high school or college, the need to advocate doesn't just end; rather, it eventually shifts from being her parents' duty to being her own responsibility.

One of the most important questions that women with ADHD wrestle with is whether to share their diagnosis with their supervisor or colleagues. Jacqueline Sinfield, an ADHD coach and the author of *Untapped Brilliance,* shares, “Having ADHD is absolutely nothing to feel embarrassed or ashamed about, but there is still, unfortunately, a stigma about it, and you don't really know how it's going to be received until you've said it.” Sinfield adds that it may not be necessary to self-disclose at all: Many women are able to take a soft approach and get their needs met without having an official conversation about their diagnosis.

Sinfield observes that some women with ADHD, particularly if they have been diagnosed later in life, may struggle with the idea of asking

> “Some kids need advocacy through college, but it gets less and less. If adults with neurotypical brains still have trouble standing up for themselves, it should come as no surprise that it takes time for girls with ADHD to self-advocate.”
>
> ~ RONA RENNER, R.N., PARENTING COACH

for what they need—whether it’s a quiet place to work, noise-cancelling headphones, or dispensation to get up and move around every so often—because they don’t want to be treated differently. However, it’s possible to ask for such things without going into your diagnosis, especially if they are simple requests you can frame as tools to boost productivity. Enough said.

New research is showing that altered microenvironments and accommodations can dramatically impact work performance—but as the work world goes hybrid, it has become easier than ever for women with ADHD to shape their ideal working conditions at home without ever involving the people at work.

SELF-ADVOCATING AT WORK

Yet, it may come to that. One woman we spoke to felt she wasn’t getting enough work thrown her way at the job—often a slow death for ADHD brains that thrive on switching from one task to the next. She struggled with the idea of disclosing her ADHD just to push the point.

Indeed, sometimes the soft approach doesn’t work, and it becomes necessary to self-disclose an ADHD diagnosis in order to gain the supports required to do the job. Sinfield recommends that women with ADHD keep a journal of the informal conversations they have had, the requests they have made, and the outcomes, so that they can be better prepared in a more official discussion.

FIND A SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE

Seeking out a supportive workplace can make a huge difference to a woman with ADHD. Meghan Brown-Enyia, M.S.W., an ADHD coach, explains, “At the core of it, you need to have a safe space. You need to be able to be in an environment where you can ask questions—a hallmark of ADHD for some. You also need to be working for somebody who is open to hearing suggestions, because ADHDers are super creative, and their voices need and want to be heard in a lot of ways.”

The reality is that a lot of positions are set up for neurotypical employees, but as awareness and acceptance of ADHD spreads, more organizations are making an effort to accommodate neurodivergence. By getting to know their own strengths and weaknesses and identifying what supports they actually need, women with ADHD can be empowered to be successful at whatever they do. *

On the Job With Brandy Walker

BY ADJUSTING THE ENVIRONMENT AND BEING CLEAR WITH COLLEAGUES, YOU CAN HARNESS YOUR ADHD FOR PEAK WORK.

In 2016, a psychiatrist evaluated 28-year-old California native Brandy Walker, who took some time off work as a teacher due to a panic attack she experienced one day when a student of hers tried to commit suicide in her classroom.

The eval was mainly to determine if she had severe anxiety. However, after answering questions and taking multiple tests, Walker discovered that she not only has an anxiety disorder but ADHD as well.

"I didn't take it seriously at first, because I was so focused on how people think about it," she said. "I'm not hyperactive, I can sit still." Yet a year and a half later, after educating herself and doing some major self-reflection, she was ready to say, "OK, now what?"

She started by taking Adderall, but "I did not like how it made me feel. As a creative person, I like how my mind works and can jump to different things. And when I was taking it, my mind was completely blank."

So today, as a director of development and marketing for the Community Counseling Centers of Chicago, Walker has instead developed a host of personal strategies to help her thrive on the job.

"At work, most people would get through a project and maybe stress out about it. But I'm like, 'Oh, this is great.' Because I can work on all of these different elements. I'm noticing this is part of ADHD. I can use my diagnosis to my advantage. Someone would invite me to a Zoom call; one of the things that I do immediately is to ask for an agenda. Because I need to know what parts I'm going to be called on to do."

"At a workplace setting, I have to be very clear about what my boundaries are and what I need," she adds. "In the line of work I do, it's very easy for you to get burned out because there's always a lot of work to do. And no one is going to tell you to stop working. With ADHD, I have a tendency to keep working."

So knowing her limits and sticking to them is key. "I know there's work to do. I'm going to keep working and know my limits," she says.

She also makes sure to decompress outside of her job. "Physical activities are really important," she says. She usually works out first thing in the morning, before the workday starts to defuse her racing mind. "I work out to start my day," she explains, "so that later I can remain seated at my desk and focus on a task at hand. Things like yoga and meditation are important."

Now 37 and living with the diagnosis for almost a decade, Walker wants other Black women with ADHD to embrace who they are, without shame. "Figure out what you need, and don't be afraid to ask for it," she advises. "Do whatever you need to do for you."

→ ***Isi Frank Ativie***

Tool Kit

A SELF-HELP GUIDE FOR ADHDers, THEIR PARTNERS, DAUGHTERS, MOTHERS, SISTERS AND FRIENDS

By Jason Teich

ORGANIZATIONS

ADHD GIRLS (adhdgirls.co.uk) is an online platform and compassion-based community that offers workshops, keynotes, training, support, a podcast, a YouTube channel, and a range of other information sources to empower neurodivergent women and nonbinary individuals with the knowledge, skills and resources they need to advocate for themselves and thrive in the world.

DUKE CENTER FOR GIRLS & WOMEN WITH ADHD (adhdgirlsandwomen.org) is one of the nation's only programs dedicated to educating patients, families, clinicians, educators and the public about the unique needs of girls and women with ADHD across the life span. The center empowers ADHD women through outreach, education, newsletters, community engagement, and promoting and undertaking cutting-edge research to improve diagnosis and treatment. This will help women make informed decisions and provide parents with tools to seek appropriate treatment and care for their daughters.

CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH ATTENTION-DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER, OR CHADD (chadd.org), is the largest organization supporting those with ADHD. Its annual conference can be attended either in person or online—so parents, professionals and patients can participate worldwide. It also sponsors local chapters and networks for parents to connect.

ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER ASSOCIATION, OR ADDA (add.org), is dedicated to adults with ADHD, starting with a symptoms checklist on the home page. Head on to the Healthy Habits and ADHD Brain Group, and a slew of workshops and peer groups for women pop right up. We especially recommend some of the free webinars, with titles such as "Making Friends as an Adult With ADHD" and "Reframe Your ADHD Diagnosis and Live an Extraordinary Life!"

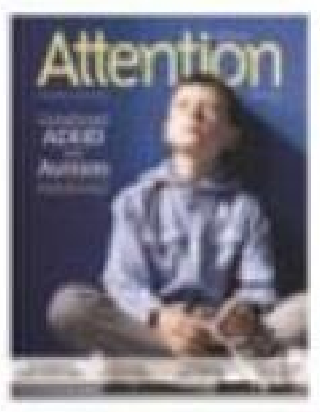
THE CHILD MIND INSTITUTE (childmind.org). For parents who want an accurate, concise primer that clearly and cleanly gives the basics, there is nothing better than this organization's Quick Guide to Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). To find it, go to the website at childmind.org and search for ADHD.

MINDS OF ALL KINDS (mindsofallkinds.com) empowers neurodivergent people, including those with ADHD, to lead in schools, workplaces and communities. Look for ADHD Navigators, and check out the eight-week program that helps adult ADHDers build the skills, systems and confidence needed to self-advocate and thrive in their careers.

↖ People with ADHD often have many stories to share. To connect with others and exchange experiences—both successes and challenges—we recommend joining a peer group in your community or online. Many of the organizations mentioned here provide links to these resources, but for adults, start by exploring ADDA (Attention Deficit Disorder Association).

MAGAZINES

ADDITUDE **(additudemag.com)** is a digital magazine for ADHD patients, their parents and medical professionals that covers the most current ADHD news week by week. It offers a deep well of resources to help ADHDers navigate their condition (or their children's condition), a weekly podcast, and top-notch coverage and advice for women and girls.



ATTENTION
(chadd.org/get-attention-magazine) is a bimonthly parent-and-patient-focused paid subscription magazine from CHADD (available in both print and digital versions), offering practical information, clinical insights, and evidence-based information on ADHD. The digital subscription grants full online access to its archives, which contain countless articles on subjects such as mindfulness, parenting and keeping friends.

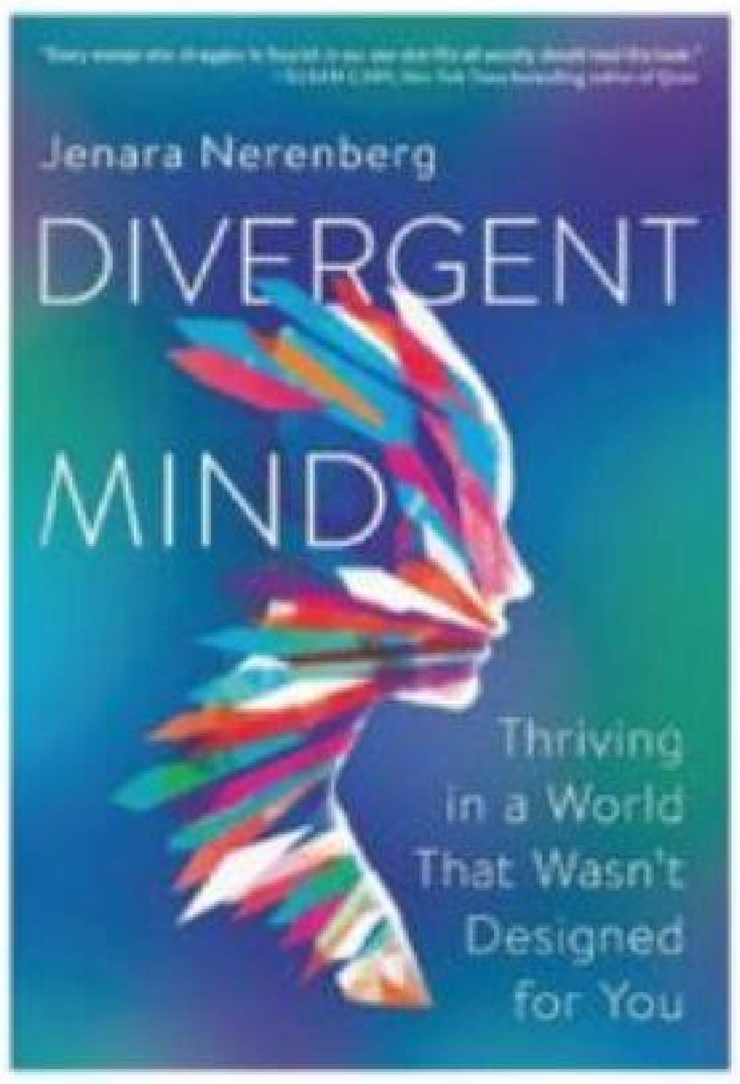
WEBSITES

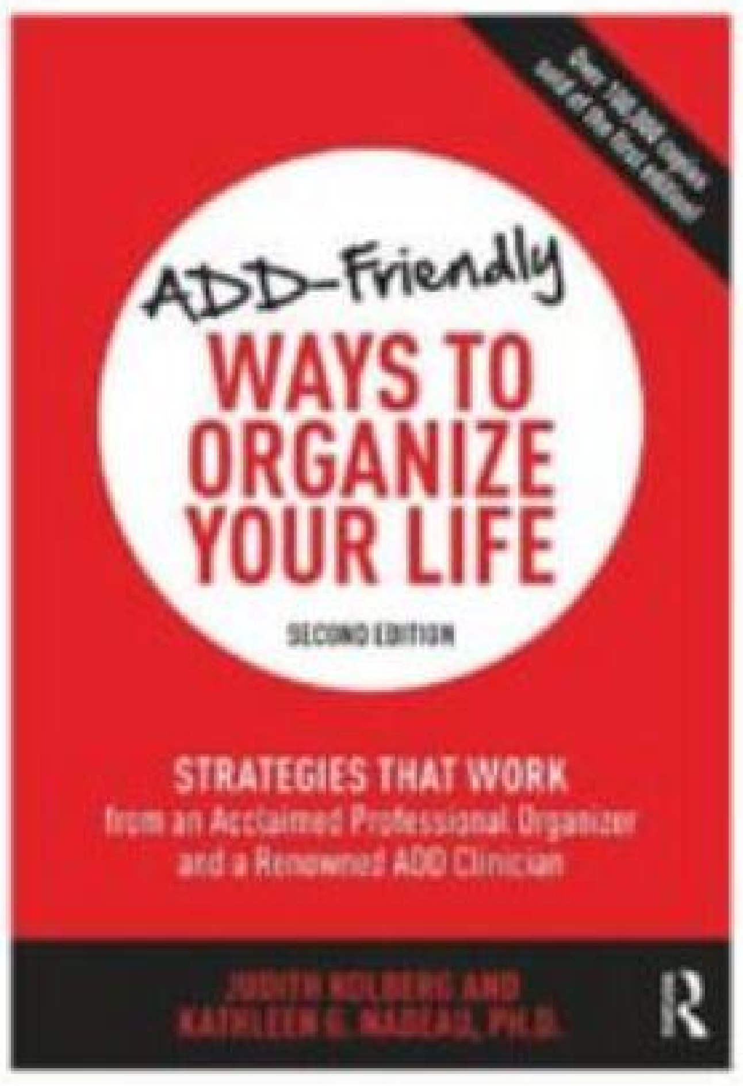
RUSSELLBARKLEY.ORG presents a lifetime of wisdom from the groundbreaking authority, one of the most respected psychological researchers in the world. Barkley's website offers YouTube videos, fact sheets and even online courses. Be sure to check out the YouTube video on sex differences in adults with ADHD and another about the impact of female hormones on the condition.

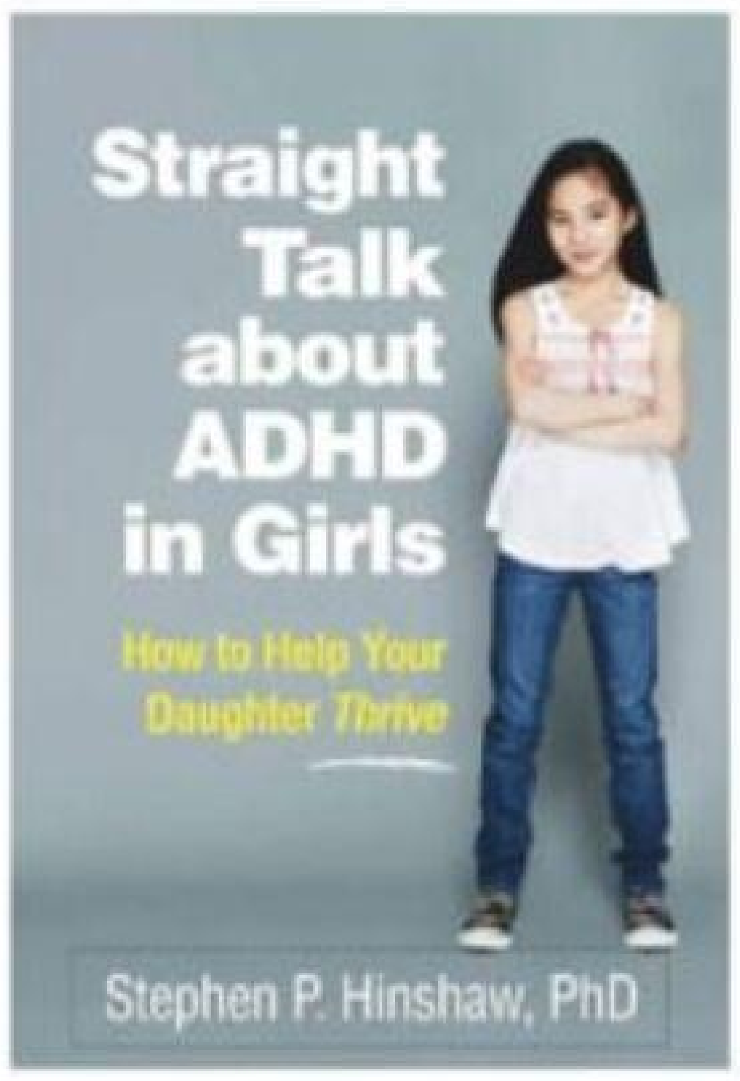
FIND THE ADHD GIRLS **(findtheadhdgirls.org)** offers tools for screening girls so they can be diagnosed before the age of 8.

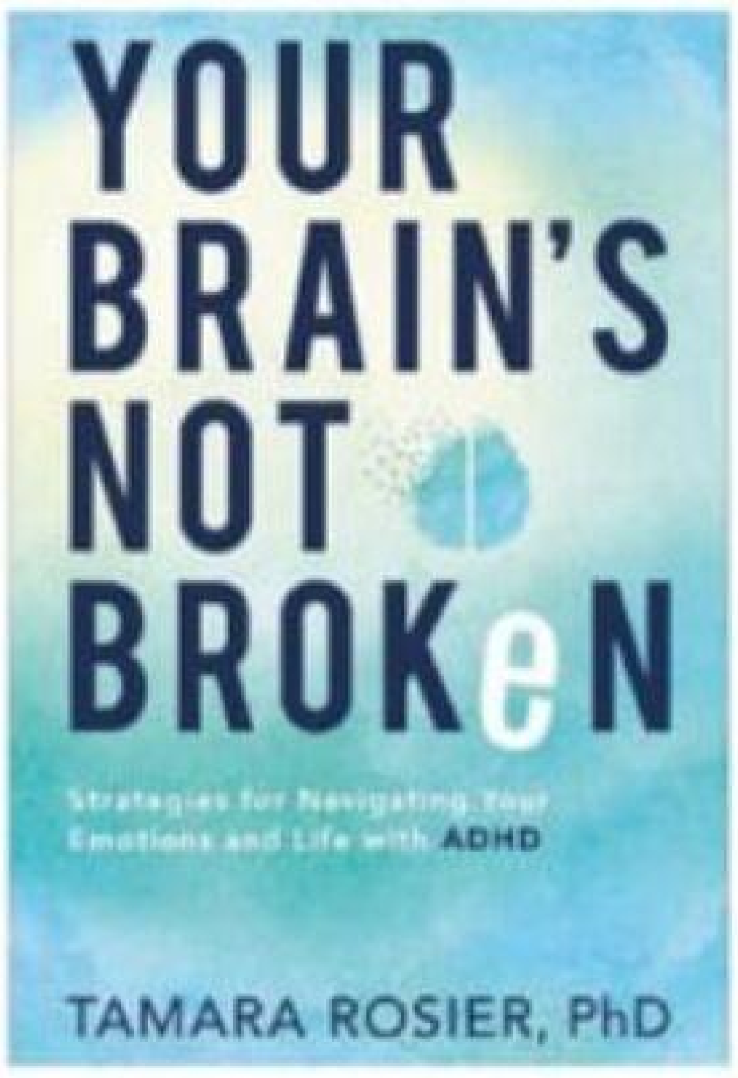
ADHD & MARRIAGE **(adhdmarriage.com).** Melissa Orlov and Dr. Ned Hallowell blog about marriage when one or both spouses has ADHD. They explore common themes and conflicts and promote proven strategies to improve these relationships. The website offers blogs, tips, community forums for discussing common issues, a plethora of useful tools and resources, and useful tips for therapists treating couples.

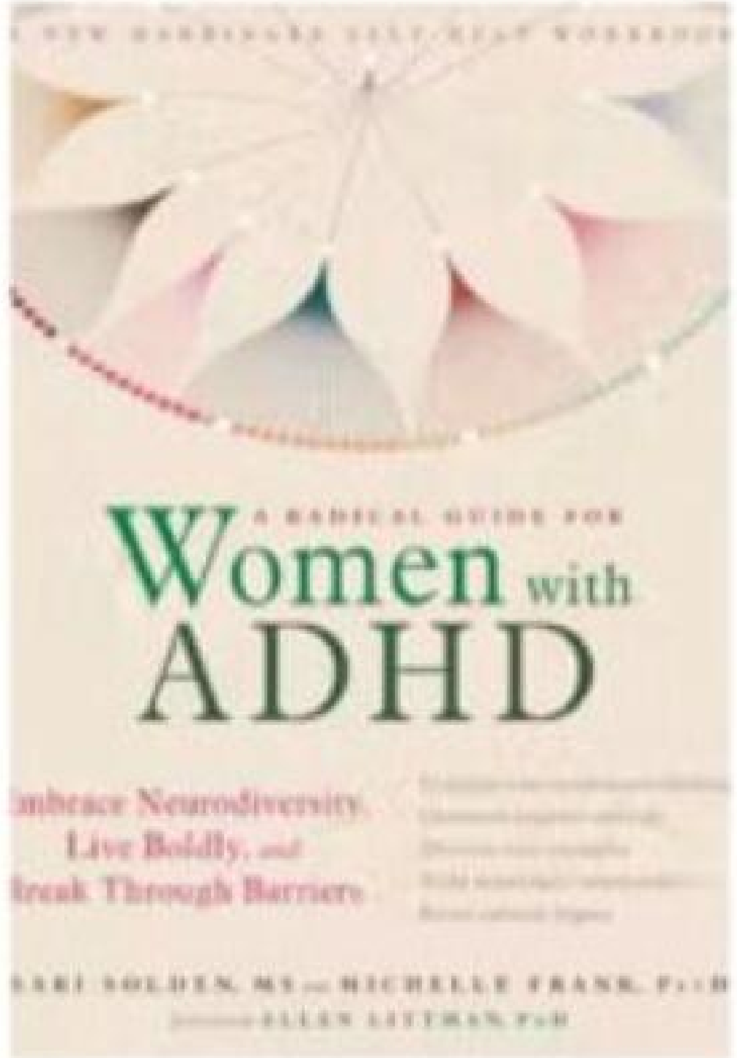
BOOKS

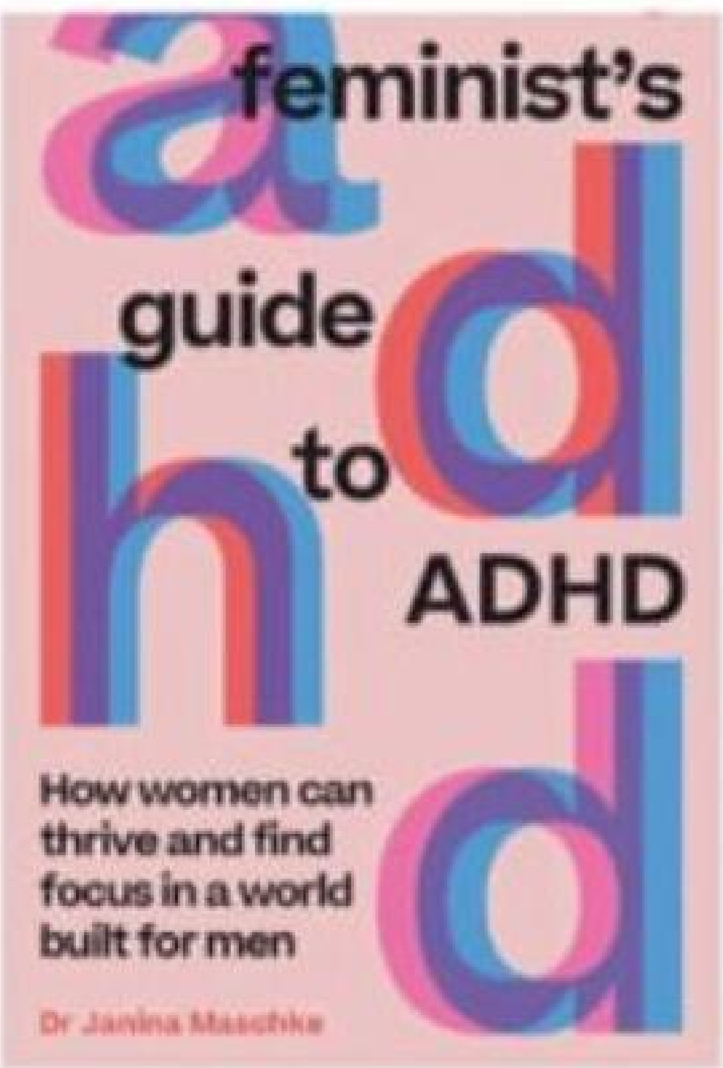

Jenara Nerenberg
DIVERGENT MIND
Thriving in a World That Wasn't Designed for You

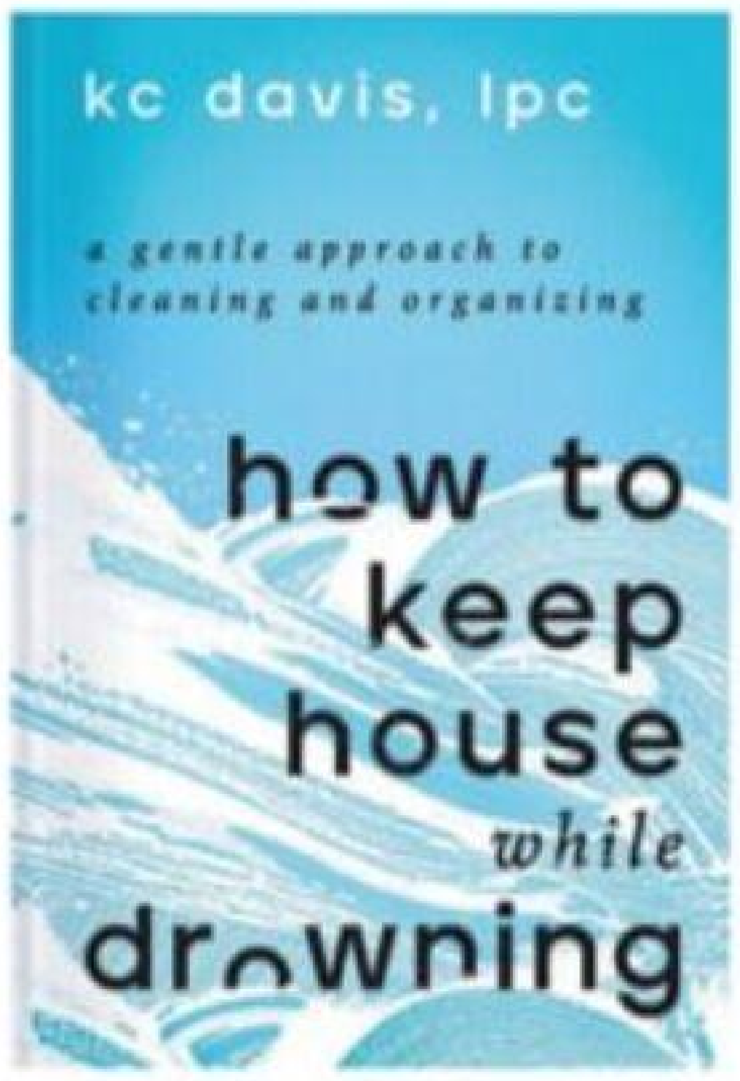

ADD-Friendly WAYS TO ORGANIZE YOUR LIFE
SECOND EDITION
STRATEGIES THAT WORK from an Acclaimed Professional Organizer and a Renowned ADD Clinician
JUDITH KOLBERG AND KATHLEEN G. NADEAU, PH.D.

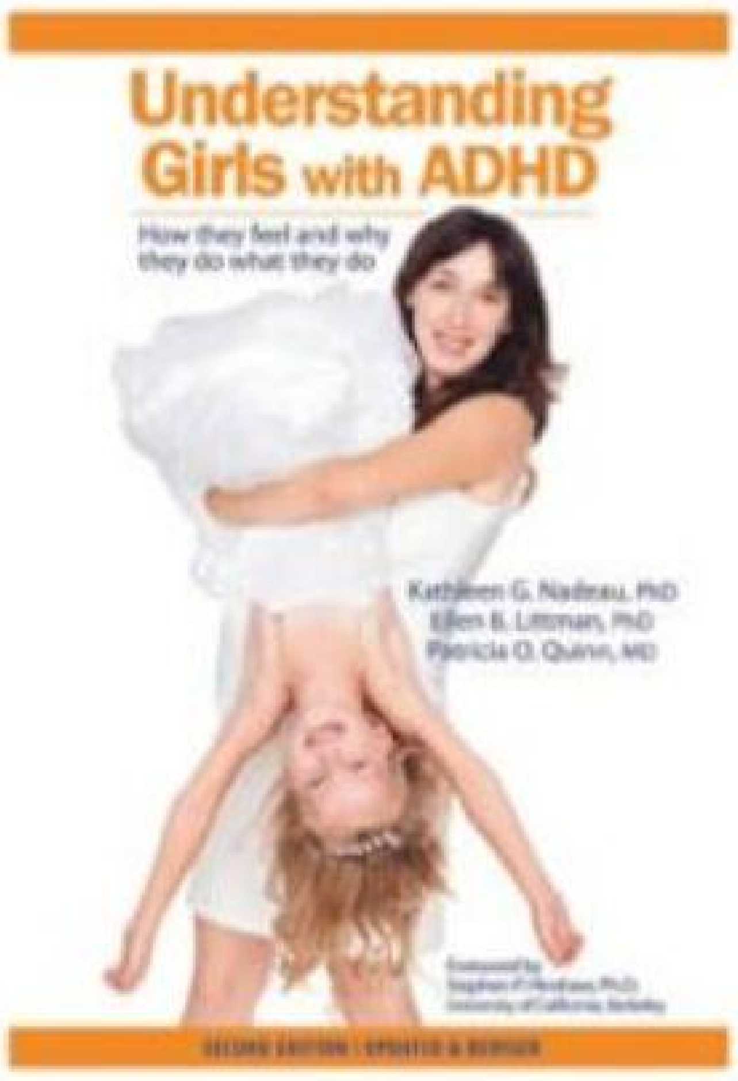

Straight Talk about ADHD in Girls
How to Help Your Daughter Thrive
Stephen P. Hinshaw, PhD


YOUR BRAIN'S NOT BROKEN
Strategies for Navigating Your Emotions and Life with ADHD
TAMARA ROSIER, PhD


A RADICAL GUIDE FOR
Women with ADHD
Embrace Neurodiversity, Live Boldly, and Break Through Barriers
SARI SOLDEN, MS and MICHELLE FRANK, PsyD


a feminist's guide to ADHD
How women can thrive and find focus in a world built for men
Dr Janina Maschke


kc davis, lpc
a gentle approach to cleaning and organizing
how to keep house while drowning


Understanding Girls with ADHD
How they feel and why they do what they do
Kathleen G. Nadeau, PhD
Ellen B. Littman, PhD
Patricia O. Quinn, MD

A beloved playlist should always be part of your go-to resources. Playing a single song from a feel-good album can boost your dopamine levels, providing the motivation and energy needed to write that next paragraph or study for a test.

PODCASTS

HOW TO ADHD (howtoadhd.com) and associated blogs dispense some of the best, most accessible advice anywhere in a balanced and scientifically credible format. Learn how to manage your neurodiversion along with guide Jessica McCabe as she chats with some of the top experts in the world.

DR. HALLOWELL'S WONDERFUL WORLD OF DIFFERENT (drhallowell.com/listen/podcast/). In this 25-episode series, pioneering ADHD researcher and practitioner Dr. Edward Hallowell talks to a host of neurodiversity champions and celebrates the differences in their brains.

ADHD FOR SMART ASS WOMEN PODCAST (tracyotsuka.com) from coach Tracy Otsuka is a much-loved collection of chats and interviews. Otsuka teaches high-achieving women to gather their powers and thrive. Subjects range from reframing experience to emotion to family.

APPS

MARVIN (amazingmarvin.com) incorporates principles from behavioral psychology to help you beat procrastination, feel in control and finish your to-do list.

CALM (calm.com) for guided meditation, relaxation, and resources for de-stressing.

DUE (dueapp.com), so you can set reminders and timers for all that you do.

FOCUS@WILL (focusatwill.com) offers music to help you focus, optimized by science. *

Amazing Marvin - On the Go
M
Preview
Calm
Focus@Will: Control Your ADD
f

ADHD

Special Issue on Girls and Women

EDITORIAL CONTENT AND DESIGN BY TIGERTAIL MEDIA

Editorial Director
PAMELA WEINTRAUB

Creative Director
KRISTEN MALE

Executive Editor
MARK TEICH

Senior Editor
DAVIA SILLS

Senior Research and Copy Editor
PATTY CARROLL

Contributing Writers
ISI FRANK ATIVIE, CAREN CHESLER, CHRISTY DUAN, M.D., TASHA EICHENSEHER, L.P.C.C., TARA HAELLE, CYNTHIA HAMMER, M.S.W., KEITH HARARY, PH.D., GILLY KAHN, PH.D., CHERYL MAGUIRE, KIMBERLY QUINN, PH.D., EILEEN DONAHUE ROBINSON, PH.D., JASON TEICH

PUBLISHED BY A360MEDIA

Chief Content Officer
AMANDA DAMERON

Chief Digital Officer
ANDY WILSON

VPs, Consumer Marketing
HOLLY OAKES
TOM MALONEY

Senior Directors, Consumer Marketing
BRIAN THEVENY
KERRY BERLET

Director, Consumer Marketing
MELANIE PISELLI

Circulation Manager
BILL FIAKOS

VP, Publishing Services & Production
JACQUI LAMORTE

Advertising Sales (Magazine & Digital)
EVP, Chief Revenue Officer
CAREY WITMER

New York Office
VP, Director – East Coast
MEGAN PICKERELLI

Midwest Office/ Chicago
VP, Director –
MIDWEST
CHRISTOPHER SVOBODA

West Coast/ California Office
VP, DIRECTORS – WEST COAST
SHELLEY FARIELLO
AMY VAN ETTEN

VP, Direct Advertising Director
LORELIS MARTE

MARKETING (Magazine & Digital)

SVP, Marketing
SUSAN PARKES

VP, Integrated Marketing
PAMELA MADDEN

Advertising Operations Director
JAIME RABB

Published by A360 Media. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without prior permission of the publisher is prohibited. Printed in the U.S.A. This message (including any attachments) is intended only for the use of the individual or entity to which it is addressed and may contain information that is non-public, proprietary, privileged, confidential, and exempt from disclosure under applicable law or may constitute attorney work product. If you are not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any use, dissemination, distribution, or copying of this communication is strictly prohibited. If you have received this communication in error, notify us immediately by telephone and (i) destroy this message if a facsimile or (ii) delete this message immediately if this is an electronic communication.

PHOTO CREDITS

COVER Dedraw Studio/Getty **2-3** 2020 Andrew Ostrovsky/Getty **4-5** frimages/Getty **6** PansLaos/Getty **8-9** Yagi Studio/Getty **10-11** Jupiterimages/Getty **13** Koraysa/Getty **14** metamorworks/Getty **16** Alexey Perelygin / 500px/Getty **18** MoMo Productions/Getty **20-21** left to right; AzmanL/Getty, jacoblund/Getty, ER Productions Limited/Getty **22** Maskot/Getty **25** Kseniya Ovchinnikova/Getty **26-27** twomeows/Getty **28-29** Marilyn Nieves/Getty **30** Hugh Whitaker/Getty **31** PeopleImages/Getty, Suradech14/Getty **32-33** left to right; Assembly/Getty, Fran Polito/Getty, S_Chum/Getty **34-35** Ascent Xmedia GmbH/Getty **36-37** Westend61 / George J/Getty **41** MStudioImages/Getty **42-44** Arina Gladyisheva/Getty **46-47** Hans Huber/Getty **48** FreshSplash/Getty **49** Maskot/Getty **50-51** Trevor Williams/Getty **52-53** AscentXmedia/Getty **54** draganab/Getty **57-58** Alexandr Dubynin/Getty **61-63** Malte Mueller/Getty **64** Adam Hester/Blend Images LLC/Getty **66** Tim Robberts/Getty **67** Eric Isselée/Getty **68-69** MoMo Productions/Getty **70-71** Klaus Vedfelt/Getty **72-73** The Good Brigade/Getty **74** Westend61 / Kniel Synnatzschke/Getty **76** Westend61 / Serjunco/Getty **77** Maria Korneeva/Getty **78** © 2019 Sunyixun/Getty **80** left to right; Veronika Pavlovska, Yuliia Korzhan **82-87** Jorm Sangsorn/Getty **88-89** manonallard/Getty **90-91** Thomas M Barwick INC/Getty **92** skynesher/Getty **93** courtesy of Brandy Walker **94** Alpha-C/Getty **95** clockwise from top left; adhdgirls.co.uk, add.org, childmind.org, mindsofallkinds.com, chadd.org, adhdgirlsandwomen.org **96** (magazines) additudemag.com, chadd.org/get-attention-magazine (books) clockwise from top left; harper collins.com, routledge.com, bakerpublishing group.com, penguinrandomhouse.com, elliottbaybook.com, simonandschuster.com, newharbinger.com, routledge.com **97** from top; Alpha-C/Getty, Apple App Store **98** martin-dm/Getty **BACK COVER** LUMEZIA/Getty

NEW ISSUE ALERT!

GRWM
GET READY WITH ME
THE ALIX EARLE EFFECT
+
MONET McMICHAEL
EMMA CHAMBERLAIN
THE 7 SECRETS HOW TO BECOME A CONTENT CREATOR
PRO TIPS
+ BEAUTY
+ FASHION
+ SKINCARE
GRWM
HOW TO BECOME A CONTENT CREATOR
250505

SCAN NOW TO SHOP!

or go to
www.magazineshop.us/grwm

FREE SHIPPING!
on all U.S. orders

Olivia Rodrigo
STYLE ALBUM
208 Photos
All-Natural
DIY Beauty
Make Your Own
FACE MASKS - CLEANSERS - MAKEUP - SERUMS - HAIR CARE
Take your beauty into your own hands

Find these and so much more
online at the Magazine SHOP

Feel your power: Harness your fast-paced mind and join the ranks of remarkable artists, entrepreneurs, teachers and innovators with divergent styles of thought and, yes, ADHD.